

HUSTLER JOE

AND OTHER STORIES



ELEANOR·H·PORTER



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BY

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HUSTLER JOE

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**I: THE ATONEMENT OF
HUSTLER JOE**

I: THE ATONEMENT OF HUSTLER JOE

PROLOGUE

A TOY horse or a raspberry-tart is not often responsible for the loss of a life, but a succession of toy horses, raspberry-tarts, and whatever else the heart of a small boy craved, given in reckless abandonment of superfluity, was certainly responsible for the wilfulness in the character of Paul Weston; and the wilfulness, in turn, was responsible for the quarrel.

At twenty he was a restless, impulsive, good-natured, broad-chested, strong-limbed young fellow, the adored of his mother and the pride of his father. And yet it was over the prostrate form of this same father that he now stood—the crack of the revolver still ringing in his ears, the weapon still clutched in his hand.

Was the man dead? But a minute before he had been speaking; now there was a fast-growing pool of something dark and horrible on the floor at his side.

Paul Weston brushed the back of his left hand across his eyes and looked down at the still smoking revolver. Had his miserable temper brought him to this? His features worked convulsively and his eyes widened in horror. Throwing the revolver from him to the farthest corner of the room, he turned and fled.

Out the door, through the gate, and down the long street of the little New England village he ran. It was dusk, but he stumbled as though it were the darkness of midnight.

The neighbors looked and wondered at the fleeing figure, but only their eyes spoke disapproval. If Paul Weston chose to use the main street of the village as a race-course, it was not for them to interfere—they knew him too well. The town fool alone ventured to accost him.

“Hi, there—go it! What’s after ye?” he shouted; but the jeering words and the vacant smile died on his lips at sight of the face Paul turned upon him.

Down the street, across the open field, and over the fence at a bound—surely the friendly shelter of the woods receded as he ran! But his pace did not slacken even in the dense shadows of the forest. On and on, stumbling, falling, tearing his flesh, and his clothing on the thorns and brambles until, exhausted, he dropped on a grassy mound, miles away from that dread thing he had left behind him.

The wind sighed and whispered over his head. Weston had always loved the sound, but tonight it was only an accusing moan in his ears. Even the stars that peeped through the leaves above were like menacing eyes seeking out his hiding-place.

An owl hooted; Weston raised his head and held his breath. Then through the forest came the bay-ing of a distant hound. The man was on his feet in an instant. Something tightened in his throat and his heart-beats came in slow, suffocating throbs. He knew that sound! They sought for—murderers with creatures like that! With a bound he was away on his wild race again. Hours later, the gray

dawn and his nearness to a small village warned him to move more cautiously.

All that day he tramped, without rest, without food, reaching at night the seaport town that had been his goal. Skulking through the back streets he came to a cheap eating-house down by the wharves.

The odor of greasily fried meats and bad coffee floated out the open door, causing Weston to sniff hungrily. In a moment he had thrown caution to the winds, entered the restaurant and slunk into the nearest seat.

By his side lay a discarded newspaper. He reached for it with a shaking hand, then snatched his fingers back as though the printed sheet had scorched them. No, oh, no—he dared not look at it! His mind's eye pictured the headlines, black with horror:

MURDER! PARRICIDE! THE FIEND STILL AT LARGE!

He pushed back his chair and rushed from the room. An hour later he had shipped as a sailor on a vessel bound for San Francisco around Cape Horn.

CHAPTER I

THE cracker-barrels and packing boxes that usually served for seats in Pedler Jim's store were, strange to say, unoccupied. Bill Somers, sole representative of "the boys," sat cross-legged on the end of the counter, meditatively eyeing a dozen flies that were buzzing happily around a drop of molasses nearby. Pedler Jim himself occupied his customary stool behind the counter.

It was ten years now since the little hunchback pedler first appeared in Skinner Valley. He came from no one knew where, driving a battered and worn horse attached to a yet more battered and worn pedler's cart. The horse had promptly taken advantage of the stop in the village, and by dying had made sure of never leaving the place for the wearisome trail again. The miners say that the night the old horse died, its master patted and stroked the poor dead head until it was cold and stiff, and that morning found him fondling the useless reins with his shriveled, misshapen fingers.

The next day he bartered for a tiny piece of land fronting the main street. When he had wheeled his old cart into proper position upon it, he busied himself some time with a bit of board and a paint pot, finally producing a rough sign bearing the single word "Store." This creation he nailed with much satisfaction upon the front of the dashboard, then sat down on one of the thills to wait for a customer.

Perhaps it was the oddity of the thing; or perhaps

there was something in the deformed little body that appealed to the strong-limbed, straight-backed miners; or perhaps it was the wonderful knowledge of healing herbs and soothing lotions that Pedler Jim possessed—perhaps it was a little of all three. At all events, the new store prospered amazingly so that in a year its owner bought more land, trundled the old cart to the rear, and erected a small cabin on his lot. This, in turn, gave place to a good-sized frame building bearing the imposing gilt-lettered sign:

JAMES A. POWERS,

SKINNER VALLEY EMPORIUM.

The Hunchback rolled this high-sounding title under his tongue with keen relish, but it was still “the store” to the boys, and its owner was only “Pedler Jim.”

Bill Somers shifted his position on the end of the counter and poked a teasing finger at the agitated mass of wings and legs around the molasses drop. The storekeeper grinned appreciatively and broke the silence:

“Say, who’s yer new man?”

“Blest if I know.”

“Well, he’s got a name, hain’t he?”

“Mebbe he has—then again, mebbe he hain’t.”

“But don’t ye call him nuthin’?”

“Oh, we *call* him ‘Hustler Joe’; but that ain’t no name to hitch a grocery bill on to—eh, Jim?”

The little hunchback slid from his stool and brought his fist down hard on the counter.

“That’s jest the point! He don’t git much, but what he does git he pays fur—spot cash. An’ that’s

more'n I can say of some of the rest of ye," he added, with a reproachful look.

Bill laughed and stretched his long legs.

"I s'pose, now, that's a dig at me, Jim."

"I didn't call no names."

"I know yer lips didn't, but yer eyes did. Say, how much do I owe, anyhow?"

With manifest alacrity Jim darted over to the pine box that served for a desk.

"There ain't no hurry, Jim," drawled Somers, with a slow smile. "I wouldn't put ye out fur nothin'!"

The storekeeper did not hear. He was rapidly turning the greasy, well-thumbed pages of the account book before him.

"It's jest twenty dollars and fourteen cents, now, Bill," he said, his brown forefinger pausing after a run down one of the pages. "Ye hain't paid nothin' since Christmas, ye know," he added significantly.

"Well," sighed Bill, with another slow smile, "mebbe 'twouldn't do no harm if I ponied up a bit!" And he plunged both hands into his trousers' pockets.

Pedler Jim smiled and edged nearer, while Bill drew out a handful of change and laboriously picked out a dime and four pennies.

"There!" he said, slapping the fourteen cents on the counter, "now it's even dollars!"

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" cried Pedler Jim, turning his back and walking over to the window.

Somers looked after the retreating figure, and a broad smile lighted up his round red face. Slipping his hand inside his coat he pulled out a roll of greenbacks. In another minute the fourteen cents lay neatly piled on top of two ten-dollar bills. The man

hastily slipped into his old position and coughed meaningly.

"Ye don't seem pleased," he began.

The hunchback did not stir.

"Mebbe ye don't want my money," hazarded the miner.

No answer.

"Oh, well, I can take it back," and Somers shuffled noisily off his seat.

Pedler Jim wheeled about and came down the store with his small black eyes blazing.

"Jiminy Christmas, man! If ye ain't enough ter try out a saint! I'm blest if I can git mad at ye, though, fur all yer pesterin' ways. Now what in thunder——" The storekeeper's jaw dropped, and his mouth fell open idiotically as his eyes rested on the greenbacks. "Well, I'll be jiggered!" he murmured again, and clutched the money in his claw-like fingers.

At that moment the outer door opened to admit a tall, broad-shouldered miner wearing a slouch hat well over his eyes. In a trice Pedler Jim was the obsequious merchant behind the counter.

The newcomer gave his order in a low voice and stood motionless while the hunchback busied himself in filling it.

"Anything else?" suggested Jim wistfully, as he pushed a small package toward him.

"Oh, I guess that'll do for this time," returned the man, picking up his purchase and motioning toward a dollar bill on the counter.

Pedler Jim looked up quickly and something like tenderness came into his eyes.

"I—guess you're from Yankee-land, stranger; shake, won't ye?" he said, thrusting his hand across

the counter. "Gorry! but it's prime good ter see a good old New Englander among all dagoes and Dutchmen and the Lord only knows what else here. Bill an' me was gittin' lonesome—I'm glad ye come!"

At Jim's first words the stranger had stepped back, but the outstretched hand had brought him to the counter again, and he gave the brown fingers a grip that made the little hunchback wince with pain. But Pedler Jim's welcome was scarcely spoken before the man had turned and disappeared through the door.

"Well, I snum! I should think he was 'Hustler Joe'!" murmured Jim. "If he didn't even hustle off and leave his change," he added, looking helplessly at the dollar bill on the counter.

Somer's laughed.

"Hustle!—you'd oughter see him at the mines! why, that man works like all possessed. He don't speak nor look at a soul of us 'nless he has to. If there's a chance ter work extry—he gits it; an' he acts abused 'cause he can't work every night and Sundays to boot. Gosh! I can't understand him," finished Bill, with a yawn and a long stretch.

"That ain't ter be wondered at—'tain't 'Hustler Bill' that the boys call you," replied Jim, a sly twinkle in his beady little eyes.

Somers sprang to his feet and towered over the little hunchback, his fist raised in pretended wrath.

"Why don't ye take a feller yer own size?" he demanded.

The hunchback chuckled, dove under the upraised arm, and skipped around the room like a boy. An encounter like this was meat and drink to him, and

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the miners good-naturedly saw that he did not go hungry.

Somers shook his fist at the curious little creature perched on the farthestmost cracker-barrel and slouched out the door.

CHAPTER II

SKINNER VALLEY did not know very much about Hustler Joe. Six weeks ago he had appeared at the Candria coal mine and asked for work. Since that time he had occupied an old shanty on the hillside—a shanty so helpless in its decrepitude that it had long been abandoned to bats and owls. Hustler Joe, however, had accomplished wonders in the short time he had lived there.

It was a popular belief in the town that the man never slept. Stray wanderers by the shanty had reported hearing the sound of the hammer and saw at all hours of the night. Outside the shanty loose timbers, tin cans, rags, and refuse had given way to a spaded, raked and seeded lawn. The cabin itself, no longer broken-roofed and windowless, straightened its back and held up its head as if aware of its new surroundings.

This much the villagers could see; but inside it was still a mystery, for Hustler Joe did not seem to be hospitably inclined, and even the children dared not venture too near the cabin door.

It was vaguely known that the man had come over the mountains from San Francisco, and with that the most were content. Keen eyes and ears like Pedler Jim's were not common in the community, and the little hunchback's welcome to the man because he came from "Yankee-land" was not duplicated.

Hustler Joe had not been in the habit of frequent-

ing the store. His dollar bill was in Pedler Jim's hands a week before the disturbed storekeeper had an opportunity of handing back the change. The miner had forgotten all about the money and had wandered into the store simply because each stick and stone and dish and chair at home was in its place and there was absolutely nothing for his nervous fingers to put in order.

Joe pushed open the door of the "emporium," then halted in evident indecision. A dozen miners were jabbering in half as many languages over by the stove, huddled around it as though the month were January instead of June, and the stove full of needed heat instead of last winter's ashes. Bill Somers lolled on the counter, and Pedler Jim was bowing and scraping to a well-dressed stranger whose face Joe could not see.

The miner had half turned to go when Pedler Jim's sharp eyes fell upon him. In another moment the hunchback was by his side thrusting some change into his fingers.

"You forgot it, ye know—when ye bought them nails," he said hurriedly; then added, "why don't ye come in and set down?"

For a second Joe hesitated; then he raised his head with a peculiarly defiant up-tilting of his chin, and strolled across the room to an unoccupied cracker-barrel behind the gesticulating miners. Pedler Jim went back to his customer.

"You won't find a better smoke within fifty miles!" he said pompously, giving the box of cigars on the counter a suggestive push.

The well-dressed man gave a disagreeable laugh.

"Well, that's hardly saying very much, is it?" he questioned.

At the stranger's first words Hustler Joe glanced up sharply. His fingers twitched and a gray look crept around the corners of his mouth. The room, the miners, and Pedler Jim seemed to fade and change like the dissolving pictures he used to see when a boy. A new England village street drifted across his vision with this well-dressed stranger in the foreground. He could even see a yellow-lettered sign out one of the windows:

GEORGE L. MARTIN,

COUNSELOR AT LAW

Then it all faded into nothingness again—all save the well-dressed stranger in the tall black hat. In another minute the jabbering miners, Bill Somers, and the obsequious hunchback were in their old places, and Pedler Jim was saying:

"Jest try 'em, an' see fur yerself."

"All right, I'll take you at your word," laughed the stranger, picking out a cigar and leisurely striking a match. "It's a pity you can't have a few more languages going it here," he added, throwing the dead match on the floor and glancing at the group around the stove. "I suppose Barrington employs mostly foreigners in the mines, eh?"

The hunchback thrust his brown fingers through his hair and made a wry face.

"Foreigners!" he exclaimed. "I was born and raised in the state of Maine, an' if it wa'n't fur Bill Somers—he's from York State—to talk God's own language to me once in a while, I'd 'a' gone daft long ago!"

"You hav'n't anyone here at the works from New

England, then, I take it, eh?" he asked, with studied carelessness.

A smile crept up from Pedler Jim's mouth and looked out of his twinkling eyes.

"Well, we have——" he began, then his eyes suddenly lost their twinkle as they encountered the despairing appeal from beneath Hustler Joe's slouch hat. "We have—been wishin' there would be some," he finished after the slightest of hesitations. "We've got everythin' else under the sun!"

Bill Somer's long legs came down from the counter abruptly.

"Why, Jim, there's Hustler Joe—ain't he from New England?"

The hunchback's little beany eyes turned upon Somers and looked him through and through without winking.

"Hustler Joe came over the mountains from San Francisco, I have heard," he said blandly.

"Oh, so he did—so he did!" murmured Somers, and sauntered out the door.

The man on the cracker-barrel over in the corner pulled his hat down over his eyes and sank back into the shadows.

"Well," said the stranger, tossing a bill and a white card on the counter, "put me up a dozen of those cigars of yours, and there's my card—if you happen to know of any New Englanders coming to these parts, just let me know at that address, will you? I'll make it worth your while."

"Very good, sir, very good," murmured Pedler Jim, making a neat package of the cigars. "Thank you, sir," he said suavely, holding out the change and glancing down at the card; "thank you, Mr.—er—Martin." And he bowed him out of the store.

One by one the miners went away; still the figure on the cracker-barrel remained motionless. When the last jabbering foreigner had passed through the door, Hustler Joe rose and walked across the room to the pine box where the storekeeper was bending over his account-book.

"See here, little chap," he began huskily, "that was a mighty good turn you did me a bit ago—just how good it was, I hope to God you'll never know. What you did it for is a mystery to me; but you did it—and that's enough. I sha'n't forget it!"

Something splashed down in front of Pedler Jim, then the outer door slammed. When the hunchback turned to his accounts again a blot and a blister disfigured the page before him.

CHAPTER III

JOHAN BARRINGTON, the principal owner of the Candria mine, did not spend much of his time in Skinner Valley. Still, such time as he did spend there he intended to be comfortable. Indeed, the comfort of John Barrington—and incidentally those nearest and dearest to him—was the one thing in life worth striving for in the eyes of John Barrington himself, and to this end all his energies were bent.

In pursuance of this physical comfort, John Barrington had built for his occasional use a large, richly fitted house just beyond the unpleasant smoke and sounds of the town. A tiny lake and a glorious view had added so materially to its charms that the great man's wife and daughter had unconsciously fallen into the way of passing a week now and then through the summer at The Maples, as it came to be called in the family—"Skinner Valley" being a name to which Miss Ethel's red lips did not take kindly.

Mr. Barrington's factotum-in-chief at the mines, Mark Hemenway, lived at the house the year round. He was a man who took every possible responsibility from his chief's shoulders, and was assiduous in respectful attentions and deferential homage whenever the ladies graced the place with their presence.

To Ethel this was of little consequence, as she paid no more attention to him than she did to the obsequious servant behind her chair; but to Mrs.

Barrington he was the one drawback to complete enjoyment of the place.

Mark Hemenway was a man of limited means, but of unlimited ambitions. Every day saw him more and more indispensable to his comfort-loving employer, and every day saw him more and more determined to attain to his latest desire—nothing less than the hand of this same employer's daughter in marriage.

In a vague way Mrs. Barrington was aware of this, though Hemenway was, as yet, most circumspect in his actions. Mrs. Barrington was greatly disturbed, otherwise she would not have ventured to remonstrate with her husband that Sunday afternoon.

"My dear," she began timidly, "isn't there any other—couldn't Mr. Hemenway live somewhere else—rather than here?"

Her husband turned in his chair, and a frown that Mrs. Barrington always dreaded appeared between his eyebrows.

"Now, Bess, why can't you leave things all comfortable as they are? I like to have you and Ethel here first rate, but I don't see why you think you must upset things when you stay only five minutes, so to speak."

"I—I don't mean to upset things, John, but—I don't like him!" she finished in sudden asperity.

"Like him! My dear, who expected you to? Nobody supposes he is one of your palavering, tea-drinking members of the upper ten! He isn't polished, of course."

"Polished! He's polished enough, in a way, but—I don't like the metal to begin with," laughed Mrs. Barrington, timidly essaying the joke.

Her husband's frown deepened.

"But, Bess, don't you see? I must have him here—it's easier for me, lots easier. Why can't you let things be as they are, and not bother?" he urged in the tone of a fretful boy.

Mrs. Barrington knew the tone, and she knew, too, the meaning of the nervous twitching of her husband's fingers.

"Well, well, John," she said, hastily rising, "I won't say anything more," and the door closed softly behind her.

As she passed through the hall she caught a glimpse of Ethel and her friend starting for a walk, and the strange unlikeness of the two girls struck her anew. Just why Ethel should have chosen chosen Dorothy Fenno for a week's visit to The Maples, Mrs. Barrington could not understand. Perhaps it would have puzzled Ethel herself to have given a satisfactory reason.

Ethel Barrington had met Dorothy Fenno the winter before on a committee connected with a fashionable charity, and had contrived to keep in touch with the girl ever since, though the paths of their daily lives lay wide apart.

"She is mixed up with 'settlement work' and 'relief bands,' and everything of that sort," Ethel had told her mother; "but she's wonderfully interesting and—I like her!" she had finished almost defiantly.

The girls leisurely followed a winding path that skirted the lake and lost itself in the woods beyond. They had walked half an hour when they came to the clearing that commanded the finest view in the vicinity.

Ethel dropped wearily to the ground and, with her

chin resting in her hand, watched her friend curiously.

"Well, my dear girl, you——"

"Don't—don't speak to me!" interrupted Dorothy.

Ethel Barrington bit her lips; then she laughed softly and continued to watch the absorbed face of her companion—this time in the desired silence. By and bye Dorothy drew a long breath and turned to her.

"Isn't it beautiful!" she murmured reverently.

Miss Barrington gave a short laugh and sat up.

"Yes, very beautiful, I suppose; but, do you know, I've seen so much I'm spoiled—absolutely spoiled for a scene like that? I'd rather look at you—you are wonderfully refreshing. I don't know another girl that would have snapped me up as you did a minute ago."

"Indeed, I beg your pardon," began Dorothy in distress.

"Don't!" interrupted her friend with a petulant gesture; "you'll be like all the rest if you do."

"But it was very rude," insisted Dorothy earnestly. "A view like this always seems to me like a glorious piece of music, and I want everything quiet as I would if I were hearing a Beethoven symphony, you know. That is why I couldn't bear even the tones of your voice—but it was rude of me, very."

Ethel sighed, and fell to picking a daisy to pieces.

"I used to feel that way, once," she said; "I did, really."

"I haven't a doubt of it," replied Dorothy, with a smile.

"But I don't any more!"—the daisy was tossed aside.

"No?"

"No; I'm like a five-year-old that's had too much candy, I suppose. I've seen the Alps and the Rockies, the Rhine and the St. Lawrence; and yet, the first time I looked at that view I felt just as you did. But now——!"

"You need something outside yourself to give zest to your life, my dear," said Dorothy, her eyes on the town below.

Ethel looked at her narrowly.

"Now see here, my dear, I love you—and you know it, but I just can't stand any of that old settlement talk!"

"I never said settlement," laughed Dorothy, her eyes still on the straggling cottages.

"I know, but—well, I just simply can't! How in the world you stand those dismal sounds and sights and—and smells," she added, with a grimace, "I don't understand."

"I suppose the miners live in those cottages," mused Dorothy aloud, as though she had not heard.

"I suppose so," acquiesced Ethel indifferently. "Others live over the hill in Westmont."

"They don't look as though they'd be very comfortable," continued Dorothy softly.

"Oh, I don't know; people like that don't mind such things, I fancy."

"Did you ever ask them?"

Ethel looked up in quick suspicion, but Dorothy's face was placid.

"Of course not! How silly!"

"Suppose you do, sometimes," suggested Dorothy, quite as a matter of course.

"I thought that was what you were coming to!" flashed Ethel. "My dear girl, you have no idea

what those miners are," she continued in a superior tone. "In the first place, I don't think there is one of them that understands a word of English, and I'd be afraid to trust my life anywhere near them."

"But the women and the little children—they wouldn't hurt you. Isn't there something you could do for them, dear?" urged Dorothy.

A rumble of thunder brought the girls to their feet before Ethel could reply, and a big storm-cloud coming rapidly out of the west drove the whole thing from her mind.

"Quick—we must run!" she exclaimed. "We can't reach home, but there's an old shanty just behind those trees over there. No one lives in it, but 'twill give us a little shelter, maybe," and in another minute the girls were hurrying down the hill. Big drops of rain and a sharp gust of wind quickened their steps to a run.

Had Ethel not been running with her head bent to the wind she would have noticed the changed appearance of the shanty to which they were hastening. But as it was, she rushed blindly forward, up the steps, and pushed open the door, Dorothy close to her side. Once across the threshold she stopped in amazement, while Dorothy dropped breathlessly into the nearest chair.

CHAPTER IV

THE tiny room was exquisite in its orderly neatness. The furniture was of the plainest, but bore an air of individuality. On one side was a case of books, and the mantel above the fireplace was decorated with quaint curios and beautiful shells.

A shadow fell across the floor.

"A nearer view might the better satisfy your curiosity, madam," said a voice from behind Ethel.

Ethel turned sharply to find herself face to face with a man in the rough garb of a miner. The man's eyes looked straight into hers without flinching.

"I said that a nearer view might the better satisfy your curiosity in regard to my poor possessions," he repeated.

"Yours?" she stammered, a look of repulsion coming into her eyes.

The look and the shrinking gesture were not lost on Hustler Joe. His eyes darkened. His broad shoulders bent in a mocking bow and his right hand made a sweeping flourish.

"Mine, madam; but consider them yours until the storm is over. I'll not intrude"—and he was gone.

A flare of lightning and a deafening report made his exit wonderfully dramatic to Dorothy. The rain was falling in torrents, too—a fact which suddenly occurred to Ethel. For a moment she hesitated; then she sped through the door, overtook and confronted the miner

"Go back instantly!" she commanded. "If—if you don't, I shall start for home in all this rain!"

The words were scarcely spoken before the man had turned and was hurrying her back to the house. Once inside there was an uncomfortable silence. Dorothy came to the rescue.

"I'm afraid you thought we were unpardonably rude," she began pleasantly. "You see we were caught by the shower and my friend thought no one was living here; otherwise, we would not have so unceremoniously taken possession."

"No, of course not," murmured Miss Barrington constrainedly, going over to the window and looking out at the swaying trees.

Hustler Joe made a dissenting gesture.

"Say no more: you are quite welcome," he replied, going over to the fireplace and touching a match to the light wood ready placed for a fire. "It will take the dampness out of the air, and—of your garments," he added, with a furtive glance at the tall figure in the window.

"Thank you, you are very kind," said Dorothy, drawing nearer. The movement brought her close to the mantel, and she picked up one of the shells. "Did you gather these yourself?" she asked, wondering at the light that leaped into his eyes at the question.

Ethel, turning around a minute later, found them talking like old friends together. She even caught herself listening breathlessly to a story he was telling of an Indian arrow he held in his hand. A sudden glance in her direction from the man's dark eyes sent her back to her old position with an abruptness that surprised as well as displeased her.

The storm was not a long one. The clouds were

already lifting in the west and the rain was less flood-like in its descent. Finally the sun peeped out and flashed for a moment in Ethel's eyes.

Dorothy and their host were over at the bookcase deep in a discussion of the respective merits of Scott and Dickens, when Ethel crossed the room and came toward them.

"I think," she said, with the slightest of inclinations in Hustler Joe's direction, "that the storm is over. We can go now."

"So it is," said Dorothy; then turning to the man at her side she held out a cordial hand. "Thank you very much. You have been very kind."

"Yes, very kind—thank you," murmured Ethel, bowing slightly and turning toward the door. "We shall have to go home by the road," she announced regretfully a moment later, as she stood outside looking longingly at the hillside path where the wet grass sparkled in the sun.

For a time the two girls walked on in silence, then Dorothy murmured softly:

"Not a word of English—not a word!"

Ethel gave a sidelong look from her lowered lids.

"Well, I didn't suppose they could!" she said petulantly.

"I wouldn't trust my life near one of them," continued Dorothy in the same low voice.

Ethel shrugged her shoulders and a faint pink showed on her forehead.

"Don't!" she protested. "How could you talk with him so?—what dreadful boots he wore!"

Dorothy laughed outright.

"My dear, his boots do not cover his head. Would you have a man dig coal in patent-leathers?"

Ethel made a wry face and was silent.

"Seriously, dear," Dorothy went on, "he was very interesting to me. His knowledge of books was most amazing. What he is doing here I can't imagine—he's no common miner!"

"Oh, of course not," laughed Ethel mockingly. "No doubt he's a college president in disguise! But really, I'm not in the least interested. Let's talk of something else." And she changed the subject.

And yet it was Ethel who, at dinner that night, turned to Mr. Barrington with the abrupt question:

"Father, who is living in the old shanty just beyond the Deerfield woods?"

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea, my daughter," replied the man, mildly indifferent.

"Perhaps I can assist Miss Barrington in the matter," interposed the smooth voice of Mark Hemenway. "It has lately been taken in hand by a curious creature known as 'Hustler Joe.'"

"'Hustler Joe'?" murmured John Barrington.

"Yes, sir, one of the men. A queer, silent sort—the kind that no good comes of. I'm keeping my eye on him, however."

"Indeed," observed Ethel calmly. "I thought him quite the gentleman."

The effect of her words was like that of an electric shock around the table; in fact, Ethel herself felt it to some extent, for her remark was almost as much of a surprise to herself as to the others.

"Why, my daughter!" murmured Mrs. Barrington faintly, and even Dorothy started. There was an ugly narrowing of Mark Hemenway's eyes, but it was John Barrington who spoke.

"Well, you seem to have the advantage," he

drawled. "Would you mind telling where the rest of us could meet—this gentleman?"

His daughter laughed and lapsed into her old bantering tone.

CHAPTER V

THAT portion of the Candria mine known as the "Bonanza" had been on the black-list of the miners for some time. It was more than two months since Henry Rotalick, a fire boss, had reported that an extra amount of gas seemed to be collecting in the district. The mine officials had begun at once to take the utmost precautions.

The Bonanza was one of the wealthiest portions of the mine, but, the coal being deep and of very fine quality and the slate being particularly thick, it necessitated considerable blasting to get down to the finest parts. Owing to this and to the growing accumulations of gases, the miners had for some time past been repeatedly warned to use the greatest care.

On the day after the thunderstorm, Hustler Joe was passing through this district when he came upon some miners drilling holes twelve feet or more in depth and preparing for an exceptionally heavy charge.

"You'd better look out or you'll bring the whole thing tumbling about your ears!" he said, with a sharp glance at one of the men who seemed much the worse for liquor.

A snarl of oaths in various tongues followed him as he turned his back and walked away.

Thirty minutes later every door in the Bonanza fell with a crash, and solid walls of masonry three feet through were torn as though they were but

barriers of paper, so terrible was the explosion that shook the earth.

Hustler Joe was half a mile away. The shock threw him on his face, and for a minute he was too dazed to think. Then he staggered to his feet and rushed blindly forward straight toward the place where he thought the explosion had occurred. At every turn he met fleeing men, coatless, hatless and crazed with terror. Suddenly he came face to face with Bill Somers.

"Good God, man! Where ye goin'? Are ye gone clean crazy?" demanded Bill, clutching Joe's arm and trying to turn him about.

For answer Hustler Joe wrenched himself free, picking up a half-unconscious miner and set him on his feet; then he dashed forward and attempted to raise a fallen door that had pinned another miner fast.

"Jiminy Christmas! Ye ain't goin' ter stay in this hell of a place alone anyhow," muttered Bill, bringing his broad shoulder and huge strength to bear on the door. In another moment the imprisoned man was free and in broken English was calling on heaven to reward his rescuers.

The two men did not falter for an instant, though all the while the deadly damp was closing around them. From gallery to gallery they went, warning, helping, dragging a comrade into a possible place of safety, until human endurance could stand it no longer. Exhausted, they staggered into a chamber which the fire damp had not entered.

"We—we'd better git out—if we're goin' to," panted Somers weakly.

Joe was dizzy and faint. For himself he did not care. He had long ago given up all thought of

escape; but a sudden vision came to him of the little blue-eyed woman that he had so often seen clinging to this man's arm and looking fondly into his face.

"Your wife and babies, Somers——" murmured Joe, his hand to his head as he tried to think. "Yes, we must get out somehow. There's the fanhouse—we might try that," he added, groping blindly forward.

The fanhouse, now out of use, stood at the top of the airshaft heading that led up through the Deerfield hill from the mine. And by this way the two men finally reached the open air, and there, blinking in the sunshine, they sank exhausted on the hillside.

It was some time before Somers found strength to move, but his companion was up and away very soon.

The Candria mine had two openings about four miles apart, that went by the names Silver Creek and Beachmont. The Bonanza section was a mile and a half from the surface, and was nearer to the Silver Creek opening than to the Beachmont. It was to the former entrance, therefore, that Hustler Joe turned his steps as soon as he could stand erect upon his feet.

The news of the disaster was before him. Men running from the mine, barely escaping with their lives, had told fearful tales of crawling over the dead bodies of their companions in their flight. The story flew from lip to lip and quickly spread through the entire town. Mothers, wives, daughters, sons and sweethearts rushed to the mine entrances and frantically sought for news of their dear ones.

When Hustler Joe reached the Silver Creek entrance, a bit of a woman with a tiny babe in her

arms darted from the sobbing multitude and clutched his arm.

"Bill—my Bill—did you see him?" she cried.

Hustler Joe's voice shook as it had not done that day.

"On Deerfield hill, by the fanhouse—he's all right, Mrs. Somers," he said huskily; and the little woman sped with joyful feet back by the way she had come.

It was Hustler Joe who was at the head of the first rescue party that attempted to enter the mine; but the deadly gases increased with every step. First one, then another of the heroic men succumbed, until the rest were obliged to stagger back to the outer air, half carrying, half dragging their unconscious companions.

Again and again was this repeated, until they were forced to abandon all hope of reaching the entombed miners from that direction; then hasty preparations were made to attempt the rescue from the Beachmont opening. Here, as at Silver Creek, Hustler Joe was untiring—directing, helping, encouraging. The man seemed to work in almost a frenzy, yet every movement counted and his hand and head were steady.

Slowly, so slowly they worked their way into the mine, fighting the damp at every turn. By using canvas screens to wall the side entrances and rooms, a direct current of pure air was forced ahead of the rescuers, and by night their first load of maimed and blackened forms was sent back to the mine entrance to be cared for by tender hands.

All night Hustler Joe worked, and it was his strong arms that oftenest bore some suffering miner to air and safety. Once, far down a gallery, he heard a shrill laugh. A sound so strange brought the first

tingle like fear to his heart. Another moment and a blackened form rushed upon him out of the darkness, angrily brandishing a pickaxe. Crazed with wandering for hours in that horrid charnel-house of the earth's interior, the miner was ready to kill even his rescuers. He was quickly overpowered and his hands and feet were securely bound; then on Hustler Joe's back he made the journey of a quarter of a mile to the cars that were waiting to bear him, and others like him, to the aid so sadly needed.

Toward morning Hustler Joe was accosted by one of the doctors who had been working at his side half the night.

"See here, my man, you've done enough. No human being can stand this sort of thing forever. I don't like the look of your eye—go outside and get some rest. There are fifty men now that owe their lives to you alone. Come—you'd really better quit, for awhile, at least."

"Fifty? Fifty, did you say?" cried the miner eagerly. Then a look came into his face that haunted the doctor for long days after. "Would fifty count against—one?" he muttered as if to himself, then fell to work with a feverishness that laughed at the doctor's warning.

From dusk to dawn, and again from dawn to dusk, flying ambulances, hastily improvised from every sort of vehicle, coursed down the streets with their gruesome burdens. Weeping throngs surged about the Beaumont entrance and about the stricken homes of the dead. Sleepless wives and mothers waited all night for news of their missing dear ones, and peeped fearfully through closed blinds as the dead and injured were borne through the streets.

But everywhere the name of Hustler Joe was

breathed in gratitude and love. Tales of his bravery and of his rescues were on every lip, and when the man walked out of the mine that day, he walked straight into the hearts of every man, woman and child of the place.

His fellow-workmen tried to show their love and appreciation by going in a body to his lonely cabin on the hillside. They found him muttering half crazily to himself: "Fifty lives for one—fifty for one!" And on the table before him he had placed fifty matches in a row and below them one other alone.

They looked at him half fearfully, wholly pitifully, thinking the past horror had turned his brain. But he listened with brilliant eyes and flushed cheeks to their hearty words of thanks and seemed strangely eager to hear all that they had come to say.

Yet the next morning his eyes were heavy with misery, and someone said that the matches lay strewn all over the floor where an impatient hand had cast them—all save one, left alone in the middle of the table.

CHAPTER VI

ON the day of the explosion in the Candria mine John Barrington sat on the broad piazza of The Maples reading his morning paper. Occasionally he glanced up to admire the charming picture his daughter and her friend made playing tennis on the lawn nearby.

His night's rest had been good and his morning's beefsteak tender; moreover, a certain paragraph in the newspaper before him had warmed his heart and, in prospect, his pocketbook. He leaned back in his chair and sighed contentedly.

After a time he spied Hemenway's tall form at the far end of the winding walk leading to the house. There was a languid curiosity in his mind as to why Hemenway was walking so fast; but when he caught his first glimpse of his general superintendent's face, his head came upright with a jerk, and he waited in some apprehension for the man to speak.

The girls on the lawn heard an exclamation of dismay from the piazza, then saw the two men pass rapidly down the walk and disappear in the direction of the town. Fifteen minutes later Jennie Somers, the parlormaid, crossed the lawn and approached Miss Barrington. All her pretty rose color had fled, and her eyes were wide and frightened.

"I beg your pardon—but would you please let me go to town? There has been an explosion in the mine, and my brother—he may be hurt! May I please go?"

"An explosion? How terrible! Yes, yes, child—run right along. Don't hurry back if you're needed there," said Miss Barrington. "I hope you'll find your brother uninjured," she added as the girl hurried away. When she turned to speak to Dorothy she found herself alone.

Miss Fenno appeared a few minutes later dressed in a short walking suit.

"Why, Dorothy!"

"Has Jennie gone? If you don't mind, dear, I'll go with her. I might be able to do something," explained Dorothy hastily.

"Mercy!" shuddered Ethel, "how can you go, dear? They'll be all maimed and bleeding! There'll be doctors and—and others to do everything needful. I wouldn't go—really, dear."

"I know—but there'll be something else to do. I might help someone—Jennie, for instance, if she found her brother injured. I really want to go—Oh, there she is!" And Miss Fenno hurried after Jennie's swiftly moving figure.

Ethel was restless when her friend had gone. She wandered aimlessly around the grounds, then went indoors and began to play a waltz on the piano. The piece was scarcely half through, however, before her fingers moved more and more slowly, finally straying into a minor wail that ended abruptly in a discordant crash as the player rose from the piano-stool.

Miss Barrington's next move was to take the field-glass from the library and go upstairs to the tower. From there she could see the village and catch occasional glimpses of hurrying forms. She could see the Silver Creek entrance to the mine, too, and she shuddered at the crowds her glasses showed her there. Twice she turned her eyes away and started down

the winding stairs, but each time she returned to her old position and gazed in a fascination quite unaccountable to herself at the moving figures in the distance.

By and by she saw the head-gardener coming rapidly up the road from the town. As he entered the driveway she hurried down the stairs and out into the kitchen.

"Were there many injured, Peter?" she asked anxiously as the man came into the room.

"They don't know yet, ma'am; they can't get into the mine. They're goin' to try the Beachmont openin' now."

"Perhaps they won't find things so bad as they think," she suggested.

"Mebbe not; but them that has come out, ma'am, tell sorry tales of creepin' over dead men's bodies—there ain't much hope for the poor fellers inside now, I'm 'fraid."

"Is—is there anything one can do?"

Peter shook his head.

"Not much, ma'am. They can't get in to get 'em out. The young lady from the house here has got her hands full with the women and children. They are takin' on awful, of course, but she kinder calms 'em down—she and that feller they call Hustler Joe."

Miss Barrington turned away. As she opened the door she stopped abruptly and looked back into the kitchen.

"If they need anything, Peter—anything at all—come to me at once," she said hurriedly, and closed the door behind her.

It was at dinner the next night that Mr. Barrington said to his general superintendent:

"What was the matter with Rotalick today? I heard you laying down the law pretty sharp to him this noon."

"Oh, he wanted a prima donna, that's all."

"A what?"

Hemenway laughed.

"Yes, I thought so, too. It was simply this. There isn't anyone to sing at the funerals Thursday. The choir that usually sings at funerals hereabouts is incapacitated through injuries to the bass and loss of a husband to the soprano. Rotalick wanted a day off to go hunting for singers over in Westmont."

"Humph!" commented Mr. Barrington.

"I rather think our departed friends will excuse the lack of music," laughed the general superintendent coarsely; but the laugh ceased at a flash from Miss Barrington's eyes.

"Will you be so kind, Mr. Hemenway, as to tell the man that I will sing Thursday?" Once more the electric shock ran around the table, and once more Mrs. Barrington murmured faintly, "Why, my daughter!"

This time Mark Hemenway rose promptly to the occasion.

"How very kind!" he said suavely. "Indeed, Miss Barrington, one could almost *afford* to die for so great an honor. I will tell Rotalick. The miners will be overjoyed—they have bitterly bemoaned the probable lack of music tomorrow. Funny they should care so much!"

"Oh, I don't know—they are human beings, I suppose," Miss Barrington suggested.

"Yes—of course—certainly—but then——"

"You seem troubled to find a solution," she remarked, with slightly uplifted eyebrows; "suppose you give it up?"

"Suppose I do," he acquiesced with ready grace, glad of the way of escape she had opened.

CHAPTER VII

MANY of the victims of the explosion had lived in Westmont, but for those whose homes had been in Skinner Valley a succession of funeral services had been arranged to take place in the Slovak Catholic Church, the largest audience-room in the town. It was here that Miss Barrington had offered to sing, and as one sad service followed another in rapid succession the task she had undertaken was no slight one.

But her heart did not lose its courage nor her voice its sweetness all through those long hours. She did grow sick and faint, though, as the throngs of weeping women and children filed in and out of the church, and her voice trembled and nearly broke when a young girl fainted and sank to the floor.

Hustler Joe had not been known to step inside of a church since he came to Skinner Valley. On the day of the funerals he had lapsed into his old unapproachableness. He left his cabin early in the morning and joined the moving crowds toward the church, but, once there, he lost himself in the throngs outside instead of entering the doors.

Hustler Joe had long since made up his mind that a church was no place for him. He had the reverence, born of a New England boyhood's training, for all things sacred, and he had come to feel that his own presence was an unpardonable insult to any holy place.

The windows of the church were open and the

chanting tones of the priest floated out to his ears. He imagined himself as one of those still, silent forms before the chancel, and he bitterly envied the dead.

"'Twould have been the easiest way out of it!" he muttered under his breath. "By Jove, what a voice!" he added aloud a moment later, as the priest's droning gave way to the flute-like tones of a singer.

"It's old Barrington's daughter—ain't she great?" said Bill Somers at his elbow. The man had been there several minutes furtively watching for a chance to speak.

Hustler Joe did not answer until the last note quivered into silence. Then he drew a long breath and turned around.

"Barrington's daughter? What is she doing here?"

"Singin'—didn't ye hear her?"

"But why? How happens it?" Joe demanded.

"Rotalick said she heard how that the choir couldn't sing and that the Slavs and Poles were makin' a terrible touse 'cause there wa'n't no music. So she jest stepped up as pleasant as ye please an' said she'd sing for 'em. She's a daisy, an' as purty as a picture. Have ye seen her?"

"Yes," replied Hustler Joe shortly, moving away.

Ethel Barrington's singing won her many sincere, if humble, admirers that day, but perhaps no one inside the building listened quite so hungrily for every tone that fell from her lips as did a tall, sad-eyed man who stood outside—just beneath the open window.

When the last sombre procession had moved away from the doors, and Miss Barrington herself, white and faint with weariness, stepped into her carriage,

Hustler Joe left his position under the window and walked slowly towards his home.

"Yes, I'll go back," he muttered. "There's nothing but hell upon earth to be gained by running away in this cowardly fashion. I'll give myself up and take the consequences—which will be hell somewhere else, I suppose," he added grimly. "Good God—it can't be worse than this!"

He pushed open his cabin door and looked about him with troubled eyes. For the first time he was conscious of a fondness for the place.

"I'll give them to Jim," he said aloud, his eyes lingering on the books and on the shells and curios over the mantel.

With feverish haste he began collecting a few necessities into a travelling-bag. It was packed and strapped when there came a knock at the door. At so unusual an occurrence Hustler Joe started guiltily. Then he crossed the room and threw wide the door.

The bent form of an old woman with two frightened eyes peering out from beneath a worn shawl confronted him.

"Has he been here?" she whispered, stepping into the room and glancing furtively around her.

"He? Who?"

"Then he hasn't, or you'd know it," she answered in a relieved tone; but her expression changed almost instantly, and her frail form shook with terror. "But he may come! You wouldn't give him up—you're Hustler Jim, ain't ye? They say you're good an' kind. Oh, you wouldn't give him up!"

A strange look came into the miner's eyes.

"No, I wouldn't give him up," he said after a moment. "But who is he? And who are you?"

"I'm his mother, sir. He didn't know anyone was

livin' here," she apologized, "an' he sent me a bit of paper sayin' he'd meet me here tonight. Oh, sir, they'd hang him if they got him! Hang him!" she shuddered.

Hustler Joe's lips twitched, then settled into stern lines.

"Ye see," continued the woman, her voice husky with feeling, "his daddy was—was one of them that was killed, an' my boy came back to look once more on his poor dead face today. He said he'd colored his hair an' changed his looks so no one would know him; but oh, they'd hang him—hang my boy!" she finished in a frenzy, wringing her hands and swaying her body from side to side.

Through the window Hustler Joe saw the figure of a man moving among the shadows of the trees near the house. The miner stepped close to the old woman and laid a light hand on her shoulder.

"Listen! I am going away for an hour. When I am out of sight, go out to the trees behind the house and call your boy in. I shall be gone and shall know nothing of it—you can trust me. Do you understand?"

A heartfelt "God bless you!" rang in his ears as he left the house and hurried away.

When he returned an hour later he found these words scrawled on a bit of brown wrapping-paper:

You treated me white. Thanks. You don't know what you saved my mother. It would have broke her heart if they had strung me up. Thanks.

Hustler Joe stared fixedly at the note long after he had read it; then he tore the paper into tiny bits and dropped them into the fireplace. Very

slowly he opened the travelling-bag and unpacked one by one the articles therein. When the bag was empty and the room restored to its spotless order, he drew a long breath.

“Yes, ’twould break her heart; she’s less miserable if I stay where I am,” he murmured. “Poor dear mother, she’s suffered enough through me already!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE days that followed were busy ones for Ethel. Company made The Maples gay with fun and laughter; but Ethel did not drop her newly awakened interest in the miners. By her earnest persuasion Miss Fenno had agreed to lengthen her visit, the need of these same miners having been held up by the wary Ethel as good and sufficient reason for her remaining.

A maid, laden with the best the house afforded, always accompanied Dorothy on her frequent visits to the town, and sometimes Ethel herself went. It was after her first trip to this sort that she burst unceremoniously into the library.

"Father, do you do anything for them?" she demanded breathlessly.

"My dear, not being aware of the antecedent of that pronoun, I may not be able to give a satisfactory answer to your question."

"What? Oh—sure enough!" laughed Ethel. "I mean the miners, of course."

"Since when—this philanthropic spirit, my dear?"

"Do you, father?" persisted Ethel, ignoring the question.

"Well," Mr. Barrington began, putting the tips of his forefingers together impressively, "we think we do considerable. We are not overbearing; we force no 'company store' on them, but allow that curious little Pedler Jim full sway. We—how—

ever, have you anything to suggest?" he suddenly demanded in mild sarcasm.

Somewhat to his surprise Miss Barrington did have something to suggest, and that something was not particularly to his mind. However, when Miss Barrington set out to have her own way she usually had it, even with her comfort-loving father—perhaps it was because he was a comfort-loving father that he always succumbed in the end.

At all events, the Candria Mining Company, after the explosion in the Bonanza section, organized a system of relief to which they ever after adhered. The family of each miner killed in the disaster, or dying from its effects, received one thousand dollars cash over and above all medical and burial expenses. The maimed were dealt with according to the extent of their injuries.

The mine was a great source of interest to all of Miss Barrington's friends, and it was accounted a great day among them when a party under careful escort were allowed to "do the mines," as they enthusiastically termed a glimpse of the mine buildings and a short trip through a few underground passages.

Two weeks after the explosion Ethel, with a merry party of ladies and gentlemen led by Mark Hemenway, and duly chaperoned, started for the Beachmont entrance to the mine. The general superintendent was in his element. He explained and exhibited all through the outer buildings, and was about to take his charges into the mine when an unavoidable something intervened and claimed his immediate attention. It was with evident reluctance that he therefore handed his party over to Bill Somers, who, having proved himself careful and at-

tentive, had often before been intrusted with the escort of sight-seers over the mines.

To Ethel the change was a relief. A vague unrest had lately assailed her whenever in Hemenway's presence and she had almost unconsciously begun to avoid him. Her old indifference to his existence had given way to a growing realization that there was such a being, and the realization was bringing with it an intangible something not quite pleasant.

The feminine portion of the party followed Bill Somers through the strange underground chambers with daintily lifted skirts and with many a shudder and half-smothered shriek. And though they laughed and chatted at times, they cast sidelong glances of mingled curiosity and aversion at the stalwart forms of the begrimed miners.

"Is—is this anywhere near the—accident?" asked Miss Barrington, looking behind her fearfully.

"No, ma'am—oh, no!" reassured Bill Somers quickly. "The Bonanza is a long ways off. We don't go nowheres near there today, ma'am."

"Oh, was there an accident?" chimed in a pretty girl with rose-pink cheeks.

"Sure; this was the mine, wasn't it?" interposed a fussy little man with eyeglasses through which he was peering right and left with his small, near-sighted eyes.

"Tell us about it, please," begged three or four voices at once; and Bill needed no second bidding.

When they passed Hustler Joe, Somers pointed him out, and as they walked on into the next gallery he told with unconscious power the story of the heroic rescue of the imprisoned men. The shifting shadows and twinkling lights made the telling more impressive, and the dusky forms flitting in and out

of the mysterious openings on either side, added a realistic touch to the tale that sobered the gay crowd not a little. Their interest in the earth's interior waned perceptibly.

"Are—are we on the way out, now?" asked the pretty girl, her cheeks showing white in the gloom.

"No, ma'am; we're goin' in deeper. Wa'n't that what ye wanted?" returned Bill.

"Yes, of course," murmured the girl, without enthusiasm.

The man with glasses coughed.

"Really, Miss Barrington, this is beastly air. It might be well enough to go back before long."

Bill Somers took the hint. He knew the type to which the fussy little man belonged. The party turned about, and the pretty girl's eyes flashed with a grateful glance—a glance which the near-sighted-glassed saw and promptly appropriated.

As they repassed Hustler Joe, Ethel Barrington dropped behind the others and came close to the miner's side.

"I want to thank you myself," she said, the crimson staining her cheeks as she impulsively held out a slim, ungloved hand. "I want to tell you how much I appreciate your courage and bravery at the explosion."

The man flushed painfully. As he reluctantly touched her finger-tips, she added:

"You must be so happy to have saved so many lives. I knew you were a good man the minute I saw your face!"

Hustler Joe grew white to the lips, dropped her hand rudely and turned away without a word.

Hemenway met the party at the entrance of the

mine. He was profuse in apologies for his enforced absence and in offerings of further service, but Miss Barrington dismissed him with a cool "Thank you; nothing more," and led the way to The Maples.

Miss Barrington was vexed—worse than that, she was vexed because she was vexed. Her pulse quickened and her nostrils dilated as she thought of Hustler Joe and of the way he had met her impulsive greeting.

"The—the rude—boor!" she said to herself, at loss for words to express fittingly that to which she was so little accustomed. A lingering touch or a gentle pressure was the usual fare of Miss Barrington's graciously extended hand—never this wordless touching of her finger-tips and hasty, rude release. "Not that I care," she thought, with a disdainful tilt of her head. "But he might have been decently civil!" she added, with a scornful smile as she thought of how differently a score of pampered youths of her acquaintance would have received so signal a mark of favor as she had that afternoon bestowed on an all too unappreciative miner.

When Hustler Joe had left Miss Barrington so abruptly he had attacked his work with a fierceness that even the miners had never seen him show. "A good man—a good man—I knew you were a good man!" he muttered between his teeth. "A 'good' man indeed—bah!" he snarled aloud, wielding his pick with long, sweeping strokes. Then he suddenly stood upright. "Great God—am I not a good man? Have fifty lives not a feather's weight?"

The pick dropped from his relaxed fingers, and his hands went up to his head.

The Atonement of Hustler Joe 55

"Ah, no," he moaned; "father—father—fifty, a hundred—a thousand times a hundred could not tip the scales with your dear, dead self on the other side!"

CHAPTER IX

EXCITING days came to Skinner Valley. Gold was discovered far up the creek. A man furnished with funds by Mark Hemenway, who long had expressed faith in the locality, had "struck it rich," and the general superintendent awoke one day to find himself wealthy.

The effect of this awakening was as immediate as it was startling. His commanding tones took on an added imperiousness, his clothing a new flashiness, and his whole demeanor an importance likely to impress the most casual of beholders. His veiled attentions to Miss Barrington gave way to a devoted homage that was apparent to all men, and so thick was his armor of self-conceit that her daily snubs fell pointless at his feet.

Miss Barrington had never before spent so long a time at The Maples, and Mr. Hemenway's sudden accession to wealth resulted, as far as she was concerned, in hasty preparations to leave. Her guests were already gone.

On the day before her intended departure she started off by herself to enjoy one more sunset from the clearing beyond the Deerfield woods, the place where she and Dorothy were overtaken by that memorable thunder-shower.

Mark Hemenway did not confine himself so strictly to business these days as had heretofore been his custom, and he was upstairs in his room where

he spied Miss Barrington's lithe figure disappearing in the grove that skirted the grounds on the west.

The general superintendent had lately invested in a tall silk hat, and it was this impressive bit of headgear that he donned as he left the house and followed, at a discreet distance, the form of the woman he meant to marry.

Since Hemenway had become rich this idea of marriage had strengthened wonderfully. In a certain coarse way the man was handsome, and the only class of women with which he had ever come in contact had readily welcomed his attentions. He had supposed the lack of money would be the only drawback in the eyes of this his latest love, and now that the lack no longer existed he was confident of success.

Miss Barrington followed the path very leisurely, picking a flower or a fern here and there, and softly humming a tune. Upon reaching the clearing she settled herself comfortably under her favorite tree and opened her book to read. It was then that Hemenway approached from the shadows of the path she had just left.

At the snapping of a dry twig Miss Barrington glanced up. Her first impulse was to laugh, so absurd did the checkered trousers, flaming watch-charm and silk hat look to her against the background of the cool green woods. But the laugh was killed at birth by an angry objection that the man should be there at all. Even then she supposed him to be merely passing by and that he might stop for a word or two.

"Ah, good afternoon, Miss Barrington. What a surprise to find you here," fibbed Hemenway, advancing with easy confidence.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hemenway." Miss Barrington moved her book suggestively and lowered her eyes.

"Charming view you have here!" said the man.

No reply.

"You have an interesting book there, Miss Barrington?"

"I don't know—I'm trying to find out," replied Miss Barrington with calm but ineffectual rudeness.

"Um—delightful place to read! Nice day, too."

No answer.

Mr. Hemenway looked down approvingly at the lowered lids of the girl's eyes and, blinded by his vast conceit, mistook the flush of annoyance for the blush of maidenly shyness. "I never did like a girl to fling herself in my face," he mused, coming a little nearer.

"Well," he said aloud, "if you have no objections, Miss Barrington, I'll just stop a bit with you and enjoy this breeze," and he cast himself at her feet in careful imitation of the attitude he had seen the fussy man with glasses assume only the week before.

Miss Barrington was speechless with indignation. Her first instinct was to spring to her feet, but the paralysis of amazement that had struck her dumb had also rendered her, for the moment, incapable of motion. A sudden determination to "teach the man a lesson and stop once for all this insufferable persecution"—as her mind expressed it—followed, and she remained passively quiet.

There was an uncomfortable silence that to any man but Hemenway would have proved embarrassing.

"Er—I believe I haven't told you," he began

finally, "how kind I thought it was of you to interest yourself as you have in the miners."

"It is not necessary that you should," said Ethel icily.

"Very becoming modesty!" thought Hemenway. Aloud he said: "Oh, no, not necessary, perhaps, but I want to do it. It is a pleasure to me."

"It is not one to me."

Hemenway frowned. There was such a thing as carrying this modesty too far.

"Your singing, too—it was delightful!" he continued smoothly. "And so kind of you to do it!"

Miss Barrington turned a leaf of her book with an unnecessary rustling of the paper.

"Feigning indifference," commented Hemenway to himself. "I've seen 'em do that before."

"You looked so tired that night after the funerals. I actually worried about you—you looked sick," he said next, in what was meant for tender tones.

Miss Barrington's eyes narrowed ominously as she replied:

"Mr. Hemenway, my actions and my looks can have no possible interest for you. I should be obliged if you would cease to consider them."

To Hemenway's perverted fancy this was but a bit of shy bait. He promptly took advantage of it.

"On the contrary, I have the very greatest interest, my dear Miss Barrington—the very warmest interest. I—I—Miss Barrington, as you may be aware, I am a rich man now."

"That does not concern me in the least," retorted Ethel sharply.

A strange expression came over Hemenway's face. For the first time a doubt shook his egotistical content. His eyes grew hard. No maidenly shyness

prompted that speech. Still—possibly she had not understood.

"Miss Barrington, it has long been in my mind to ask you to be my wife. I love you, and now I am rich I am confident I can make you——"

"Stop! I won't even listen to you!" Miss Barrington was on her feet, her eyes blazing.

Hemenway rose and faced her. All his polish dropped like a mask, and the real man looked out from beneath angrily frowning brows.

"You won't listen, my fine lady? And why not, pray? Ain't I good enough to speak to you?"

"I hate you—I despise you—oh, I loathe the very sight of you!" shuddered Ethel, losing all control of herself. "Now will you leave me in peace—or must I say more before you quite understand me?"

Hate—despise—loathe; these words Hemenway knew. The delicate shafts of society sarcasm fell powerless against his shield of self-conceit, but these heavier darts struck home and reached a vital point—his pride. His face grew livid.

"Will you go?" repeated Ethel impatiently, not a quiver of fear in the scorn of her eyes—"or shall I?" she added.

"Neither one!" he retorted insolently.

For answer Ethel wheeled and took two steps toward the path. Hemenway was at her side in an instant with a clutch on her wrist that hurt her.

"Coward!" she cried. "Would you force me to scream for protection?"

"Do so, if you like—there's not a house within earshot, and the inhabitants of this region are not given to walking for pleasure!" He released her wrist and again stepped in front of her.

The sharp throb of terror that paled Ethel's cheek

was followed by one of joy that sent the color back in surging waves—Hustler Joe's shanty just behind those trees! It was after six—he must be there. If worst came to worst——!

"Mr. Hemenway, this is altogether too theatrical. I ask you again—will you let me pass?"

"If you think I am a man to be loathed and hated and despised with impunity, young lady, you are much mistaken. No, I won't let you pass—you'll listen to me. I want none of your airs!" he finished sourly.

Ethel's head bent in a scornful bow.

"Very well, suppose we walk on, then," she said. "I'm tired of standing." And she turned about and began walking in the opposite direction from the path that led toward home.

Mark Hemenway was suspicious of this sudden acquiescence. He hurried to her side and looked sharply into her face.

"None of your tricks, young lady! I mean business," he snarled. "If you ain't willing to hear what I've got to say by fair means, you shall by foul!" he added, bringing a small revolver into view, then slipping it back into his pocket.

Ethel was thoroughly frightened. She thought Hemenway must be mad.

"I should think you had stepped out of a dime novel, Mr. Hemenway," she began, trying to steady her shaking lips. "Nobody wins a bride at the point of a pistol nowadays!" The trees that hid Hustler Joe's shanty from view were very near now.

"Then you needn't treat me as I was nothing but the dirt under your feet," he muttered sullenly, already regretting his absurd threat of a moment before.

Ethel suddenly darted forward and around the edge of the trees, ran across the lawn and sprang up the steps of the shanty. Hemenway was close to her heels when she flung the door open with a bang and stood face to face with Hustler Joe.

"Will you please take me home?" she asked, trying to speak as though she considered it a customary thing to invade a man's house and demand his escort in this unceremonious fashion. "Mr. Hemenway is—busy and cannot go," she added, with a cheerful assurance due to the presence of the big-bodied miner at her side.

Hustler Joe instantly accepted the part she had given him to play.

"I shall be glad to be of any service," he said respectfully, with ready tact, but with a sharp glance at Hemenway.

The general superintendent bowed to Miss Barrington with uplifted hat, then turned and walked away.

"Please do not ask me any questions," said Miss Barrington hurriedly to Hustler Joe as they left the house. "You had better take me by the path through the woods—it is the nearer way, and would be less embarrassing than the main road would be for—both of us. I know you think my conduct extraordinary, but, believe me, I had good reason for asking your escort. You—you always seem to be around when I need someone!" she concluded, with an hysterical little laugh—the tension to which she had been keyed was beginning to tell on her.

"No apology is needed," demurred the man gravely. "I think I understand."

That walk was a strange one. The sun had set and the woods were full of shadows, and of sounds

unheard in daytime. Ethel was faint and nervous. The miner was silent. Once or twice Ethel spoke perfunctorily. His answers were civil but short. At the edge of the private grounds the girl paused.

"Thank you very much; I shall not forget your courtesy," she said, hesitating a moment, then resolutely offering her hand.

It was not the finger-tips the man touched this time—it was the hand from nail to wrist; and his clasp quite hurt her with its fierceness.

"Miss Barrington, you thought me a brute the other day when you spoke so kindly to me, and no wonder. I can only beg your pardon—your words cut deep. I am going to the mines tomorrow—the gold mines, I mean. I'm glad I had this chance to speak to you. You were wrong, Miss Barrington,—I—I'm not the good man you think!" He dropped her hand and turned away.

"I—I don't believe it!" she called softly, and fled, swift-footed, across the lawn.

Mark Hemenway did not appear at The Maples that night. A message from him received by Mr. Barrington in the evening said that he had been suddenly called away on business connected with his gold mine; that he would return soon, however, and would like immediately to make arrangements whereby he could sever his connection with the Candria Mining Company, as his new interests needed all his attention.

"Humph! commented Mr. Barrington. "I never saw a little money make such a darn fool of a man as it has of Hemenway!"

Ethel's lips parted, then closed with sudden de-

termination. Twelve hours later she left for Dalton without mentioning to her father her experience of the day before, and within a week she had sailed from New York on a steamer bound for Liverpool.

CHAPTER X

THE discovery of gold had made all the miners at Skinner Valley restless, and Hustler Joe was among the first to take his wages and start for the promised bonanza.

Hustler Joe of the coal mines was still "Hustler Joe" of the gold mines. The same ceaseless, untiring energy spurred the man on to constant labor. The claim he staked out proved to be the richest in the place and wealth sought him out and knocked at his cabin door.

Strange to say, Hustler Joe was surprised. He had come to the mines simply because they promised excitement and change. He had thought, too, that possibly they harbored the peace and forgetfulness for which he had so longed.

But peace fled at his approach and wealth had come unasked. Manlike, he regarded the unsought with indifference and gazed only at the unattainable; whereupon wealth rustled her golden garments to charm his ears and flashed her bright beauty to dazzle his eyes. Still failing to win his heart, she whispered that she—even she—was peace in disguise, and that he had but to embrace her to find what he sought.

It was then that Hustler Joe yielded. In a year he had sold half his claim for a fabulous sum. The other half he retained, and leaving it to be developed under the charge of expert engineers, he left for Skinner Valley.

Hustler Joe had never forgotten the little hunchback pedler, nor the debt of gratitude he owed him. Many a time in the old days at the coal mines he had tried to pay this debt, but always, in his own estimation, he had failed. So it was of Pedler Jim that he first thought when this new power of wealth came into his hands.

The news of Hustler Joe's good luck had not reached Skinner Valley, and the man was in the same rough miner's garb when he pushed open the familiar door of the "Emporium" in search of Pedler Jim.

"Well, if it ain't Hustler Joe!" exclaimed the hunchback delightedly. "You're a sight good fur sore eyes. Come back ter stay?"

"Well, awhile, maybe. How's the world using you these days, Jim?"

"Oh, fair—fair; 'tain't quite's good as I'd like—but I ain't complainin'."

"I wonder if anything would make you complain—I never heard you," remarked Joe, helping himself to a seat on the counter.

"Well now that ye mention it, mebbe I don't much—I hain't no need to. My appetite's good an' my conscience is clear; an' a clear conscience is——"

"Jim," interrupted the miner sharply, "did you ever hear of Aladdin and his lamp?"

"Huh? Oh, the feller that rubbed it and got what he wanted?"

"That's the chap."

"Well—s'posin' I have?"

"Oh, I only wondered what you'd ask for if you had one to rub."

"Gorry—I wish't I had!"

"Well, what would you?" persisted Joe, his face alight.

"What would I? Well, I'll tell ye. I'd buy the big house on the hill——"

"What—Barrington's?" interrupted Joe.

"Gee whiz, no! I mean the empty one that Rotalick lived in; an' I'd make it over into a hospital, an' I'd add to it as I was able."

"A hospital?" Why, there is one."

"Yes, I know—the company's; but the boys always have ter quit there long 'fore they're able. They can't work, an' if they laze 'round home it takes furever to git well—what with the noise an' the children an' all. They crawl down here to the store, an' my heart jest aches fur 'em, they're so peaked-lookin'. I'd have it all fixed up with trees an' posies an' places ter set, ye know, where they could take some comfort while they was gittin' well."

A moisture came into Joe's eyes.

"But how about yourself?" he asked. "You haven't rubbed out anything for yourself, Jim."

"Fur me? Gorry—if I jest had that lamp, you'd see me rubbin' out somethin' fur me, all right. I've been wantin' ter send home a box ter the old folks—'way back in Maine, ye know. Jiminy Christmas, man, there'd be no end ter the black silk dresses and gold-headed canes an' fixin's an' furbelows that I'd rub out an' send ter 'em!"

Hustler Joe laughed; then something came into his throat and choked the laugh back.

"But all this isn't for you, Jim," he remonstrated.

"Huh? Not fur me? Fur heaven's sake, man, who is it fur, then?"

The miner laughed again and slid off the counter.

"You've got quite a store, Jim. Ever wish you had more room?" he asked abruptly.

Pedler Jim not only nibbled at the bait, but swallowed it.

"Well, ye see, I'm goin' ter have the place next door when I git money enough and then I'll jine 'em together. That'll be somethin' worth while," he continued.

Hustler Joe easily kept him talking on this fascinating theme a full ten minutes, then he prepared to take his leave.

"Let's see," he mused aloud, "you came from Maine, you say. About where—the town, I mean?"

Jim named it.

"You say the old folks are living there yet?"

Jim nodded.

"Name is Powers, I suppose, same as yours; maybe you were named for your father, eh?"

"No, father's name was Ebenezer, an' mother objected—so it's 'Jim' I am. Why? Goin' ter dig up my family tree by the roots?" asked the little man whimsically.

"Not a bit of it!" laughed the miner, looking strangely embarrassed as he hurried out the door.

"Monte Cristo" had been Hustler Joe's favorite tale in his boyhood days. He thought of it now, as he left the "Emporium" and the thought brought a smile to his lips.

A few days later Pedler Jim was dumbfounded to receive a call from a Westmont lawyer.

"Well, my friend," the man began, "I have a few little documents here that demand your attention."

Pedler Jim eyed the formidable-looking papers with some apprehension.

"Now, see here, sir," he demurred, "my conscience is perfectly clear. I don't want nothin' to do with sech devilish-lookin' things as that!"—his eyes on the big red seal. "I hain't never harmed no one—'tain't an arres', is it?" he added, his voice suddenly failing him.

"Well, hardly!" returned the lawyer, chuckling to himself. "This, my friend, is the deed, filled out in your name, to the Rotalick property on the hill back here; and this," he continued, taking up another paper and paying no attention to the little hunchback, who had dropped in limp stupefaction on to a packing-box, "this is the deed—also made out in your name—to the building adjoining this store on the south. Mr. Balch, the present occupant, has a lease which expires in two months. After that the property is at your disposal."

"But where in thunder did I git it?" demanded Pedler Jim.

"That is not my business, sir," said the lawyer, with a bow.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" murmured the hunchback, gingerly picking up one of the deeds and peering at it.

Pedler Jim was still further astounded to find that to his tiny bank account had been added a sum so large that he scarcely believed his eyes. It was entered under the name "Hospital Fund."

Following close upon all this came a letter from the folks at home:

DEAR JIMMIE:

What a good, good son we have, and how can we ever thank you? ("Dear Jimmie" looked blank.) The black silk, so soft and rich, will make up into such a beautiful gown—much too fine for your old mother,

Jimmie, but I shall be proud of it. Father is already quite puffed up with his lovely gold-topped cane. Nellie and Mary and Tom and John have divided up the pretty ribbons and books and sweetmeats to suit themselves, as long as you didn't single them out by name. ("No—I'm blest if I did!" murmured Jim.) We were proud and pleased to get the box, Jimmie, both because the things were so beautiful and because you thought to send them. ("I'll be hanged if I did!" muttered the hunchback, scratching his head in his perplexity.) Why don't you come on East and see us, dear? We wish you would.

Then followed bits of neighborhood gossip and family news, ending with another burst of thanks which left Pedler Jim helpless with bewilderment.

It was that night that Somers was talking in the store.

"Yes, he's rich—rich as mud, they say, an' I ain't sorry, neither. There ain't anyone I know that I'd as soon would have a streak o' luck as Hustler Joe."

Pedler Jim was across the room, but he heard.

"Rich! Hustler Joe rich!" he demanded, springing to his feet.

"That's what he is!"

"Jiminy Christmas!" shouted the hunchback, "I've found him—he was the lamp himself!"

CHAPTER XI

IT was in Dalton, the nearest large city to Skinner Valley, that Hustler Joe began his career as a rich man.

He built him a house—a house so rare and costly that people came from miles around to stare and wonder. Society not only opened its doors to him, but reached out persuasive hands and displayed its most alluring charms. She demanded but one thing—a new name: “Hustler Joe” could scarcely be tolerated in the aristocratic drawing-rooms of the inner circle! He gave her “Westbrook,” and thenceforth “Mr. Joseph Westbrook” was the power in the city.

He was petted by maneuvering mammas, flattered by doting papas, and beamed upon by aspiring daughters; yet the firm lips seldom relaxed in a smile, and his groom told of long night rides when the master would come home in the gray of the morning with his horse covered with mud and foam. But society cared not. Society loves a Mystery—if the Mystery be rich.

When Joseph Westbrook’s mansion was finished and furnished from cellar to garret and placed in the hands of a dignified, black-robed housekeeper at the head of a corps of servants, and when his stables were filled with thoroughbreds and equipped with all things needful, from a gold-tipped whip to a liveried coachman, Mr. Joseph Westbrook himself

was as restless and ill at ease as Hustler Joe has been in the renovated shanty on the hillside.

The balls and the dinners—invitations to which poured in upon him—he attended in much the same spirit that Hustler Joe had displayed in loitering in Pedler Jim's "Emporium"—anywhere to get rid of himself. But if the inner man was the same, the outer certainly was not; and the well-groomed gentleman of leisure bore little resemblance to the miner of a year before.

On the night of the Charity Ball Westbrook had been almost rude in his evasion of various unwelcome advances, and he now stood in the solitude for which he had striven, watching the dancers with sombre eyes. Suddenly his face lighted up; but the flame that leaped to his eyes was instantly quenched by the look of indifference he threw into his countenance. Coming toward him was Ethel Barrington, leaning on the arm of her father.

"Mr. Westbrook," said the old gentleman genially, "my little girl says she is sure she has seen your face somewhere, so I have brought her over to renew old acquaintance."

Someone spoke to John Barrington then, and he turned aside, while Westbrook found himself once more clasping a slim firm hand, and looking into a well-remembered pair of blue eyes.

"You are——?"

"Hustler Joe," he supplied quietly, his eyes never leaving her face.

"I knew it!" she exclaimed, her pleasure frankly shown. "I never could forget your face," she added impulsively, then colored in confusion as she realized the force of her words.

But his tactful reply put her immediately at ease,

and they were soon chatting merrily together, closely watched by many curious eyes. Society had never seen Mr. Joseph Westbrook in just this mood before.

"Father did not recognize you," said Ethel, after a time.

"No; I was introduced to Mr. Barrington at the Essex Club a week ago. I hardly thought he would remember Hustler Joe. You have just returned, Miss Barrington?"

"A month ago—from Europe, I mean; mother is there yet. America looks wonderfully good to me—I have been away from it the greater part of the last two years, you know. When I came home to Dalton I found the name of Mr. Joseph Westbrook on every lip. You seem to be a very important personage, sir," she laughed.

"A little gilding goes a long way, sometimes," he replied, with a bitter smile.

"But there must have been something to gild!" she challenged. "Mr. Westbrook, for the last two weeks I have been at The Maples—have you been down to Skinner Valley lately?" she asked, with peculiar abruptness.

"Not for some months."

"There are some changes in the village."

"Yes?"

"That poor little deformed storekeeper has bought the Rotalick house and has turned it into the dearest little convalescents' home imaginable."

"Is that so?" murmured Westbrook, meeting Miss Barrington's gaze with a face that was innocently noncommittal. "Pedler Jim always was kind to the boys."

"So it would seem; still—someone must have

helped him in this," she suggested, her eyes on his again.

"Do you think so? Possibly! I am wondering, Miss Barrington, if we might not find it cooler over there by the window. Will you allow me to escort you?"

"Perhaps we might," she smilingly assented. "Perhaps we could find some subject of conversation other than Hustler Joe's generosity to Pedler Jim, too—we might try!" She threw him a merry glance, which he answered with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Indeed, Miss Barrington, you quite overestimate anything I may have had to do in the matter. It was entirely Pedler Jim's idea. How about the reading-room?" he suddenly asked, mentioning Miss Barrington's latest gift to the miners, "and the kindergarten class, and the—"

"Ah—please!" interrupted the girl, with hand upraised in laughing protest. "I acknowledge myself vanquished at my own game. I'll talk about—the weather, now, if you like," she finished dutifully.

Westbrook laughed, but before he could reply Miss Barrington was claimed by a tall young fellow for the next dance.

"I wonder," he mused as he saw them glide gracefully into the waltz—"I wonder if dancing belongs to those things one never forgets. I'll have to brush up my old steps—and learn some new ones," he added, after a pause.

From the night of the Charity Ball the world appeared in new colors for Westbrook. He did not stop to question the cause of all this change. If wealth were lifting her disguise and showing a glimpse of peace, he was too rejoiced to ask the reason.

"I wish you'd come up to the house some time," said John Barrington to Westbrook one evening soon after the Charity Ball. "I'd like to talk with you—we can't make any headway in this infernal racket!"—the "infernal racket" in question being the high C's and low G's of some world-famous singers at a particularly exclusive musical.

Westbrook smiled.

"Thank you; I should be only too happy."

"Than call it tomorrow night—to dinner. Seven o'clock."

"I will—and thank you," said Westbrook after a momentary hesitation.

To his daughter John Barrington said a little later:

"Oh, I've invited Mr. Westbrook up to dinner tomorrow night."

"Mr. Westbrook!"

"Why, yes—why not? You seem surprised."

"Gilding does count, doesn't it, father dear?"

"Eh? Gilding? My dear, I don't know what you mean. I know he's rich as mud—if that's what you're talking about; but he's got more than money—he's got brains. He knows as much about mines as I do! I like him—he's worth a dozen of the youths that usually flutter about you."

"Perhaps he is," laughed Ethel, the color in her cheeks deepening.

That was but the first of many visits. Barrington was urgent, Ethel charmingly cordial—and Westbrook, nothing loth.

CHAPTER XII

I'M in search of a good lawyer," said Westbrook to John Barrington one day. "Can you recommend one to me?"

"Indeed I can. I have in mind the very man—he's been doing a little work for me, and he is very highly spoken of."

"That sounds about O. K. Who is he?"

"That's just the point," laughed the older man; "the name's escaped me. He's from the East—hasn't been here very long. I'll tell you what—I'll bring him to your office tomorrow. Will that do?"

"It will—and thank you."

Westbrook's "office" was something new. A life of leisure was becoming wearisome; consequently he invested in various bits of real estate, opened an office, put a man in charge, and of late had himself tended strictly to business, such time as he could spare from his social engagements.

It was into this office that Mr. Barrington came one morning accompanied by a short, smooth-faced man whose garments were irreproachable in style and cut.

"Ah, Westbrook," began Barrington, "let me introduce Mr. Martin, of Martin & Gray, the lawyer of whom I was telling you yesterday."

Again the room and all it contained—save the figure of Martin himself—faded from Westbrook's sight, and he saw the New England street with the lawyer's sign in the foreground. The next moment

the vision was gone, and he had extended a cordial hand.

"I'm very glad to meet Mr. Martin," he said, looking the lawyer straight in the eye.

"Mr. Westbrook—delighted, I'm sure," murmured the little man suavely; then, in a puzzled tone, "have I had the honor of meeting you before, Mr. Westbrook? There is something familiar about you."

"Is there?" began Westbrook, but John Barrington interrupted.

"There, Martin, you've hit my case exactly! He's puzzled me a thousand times with a little turn or twist that's like someone I've seen. Dash it—who is it?"

"My features must be cast in a common mold," laughed Westbrook, "to remind so many of one they know."

"Um—ah—well—I shouldn't want to say quite that!" retorted Barrington. "Well, gentlemen," he resumed after a pause, "I'll leave you to your own devices. I'm off—good-morning."

"Good morning, and thank you," replied Westbrook, rising. "I've no doubt Mr. Martin will prove a credit to your introduction," he concluded as he bowed the elder gentleman out. Then he turned to the lawyer and began the business at hand.

In his own room that night Westbrook carried a small mirror close to the light and scrutinized himself for some minutes.

"H'm," he mused, "hair rather gray for a man not yet thirty; still—it looks less like that of a youth of twenty."

He stroked his carefully trimmed beard meditatively.

"Hides the telltale mouth and chin pretty well," he murmured. "Mr. Joseph Westbrook can stay where he is for the present, I think."

The next evening Westbrook called at the Barringtons'. He found Ethel and Mr. Martin at the piano singing a duet which they continued at his solicitation. Then the two musicians drifted into a discussion of Martin's favorite composer, which was like a foreign language to Westbrook.

After a half-hour of this the lawyer took his leave. Westbrook drew a long breath, but it was caught and stifled in half completion by Miss Barrington's first remark.

"What a fine voice he has!"

"Er—yes, very."

"And his knowledge of musical matters is most unusual, too."

"That so?"

"Yes. He says he wanted to make music his profession, but his parents objected; so he took up law."

"Indeed," murmured Westbrook without enthusiasm.

"Yes, but he talks of musicians as glibly as though he had read Grove as much as Blackstone. I haven't had so good a time discussing my pet composers for many a day."

Westbrook stirred restlessly, and his hostess suddenly became aware of the hopelessly lost look in his eyes. She promptly changed the subject.

It was the very next day that Mr. Joseph Westbrook appeared in the leading book-store of the city.

"I want some lives of musicians," he announced.

"I beg pardon?"

"Books, I mean—lives of musicians."

"Oh, certainly, of course," apologized the clerk.

"Which ones?"

"Why—er—the best ones, to be sure." Westbrook's voice faltered at first, but it vibrated with the courage of his convictions at the last.

The clerk suddenly turned his back, and when Westbrook next saw his face it was an apologetic shade of reddish purple.

"Certainly, sir. Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Chopin——"

"Yes, yes, put me up one of each," interrupted Westbrook hastily; he was growing suspicious of the clerk. He left the store with more dignity than he usually displayed.

The real estate business would have suffered in the next few days had it depended entirely upon Westbrook, for the greater share of his time was spent in poring over the recent addition to his library. At the end of a month he was sadly entangled in a bewildering maze of fugues, sonatas, concertos and symphonies, in which the names of Bach, Beethoven, Haydn, Handel, Mendelssohn, Mozart and Chopin were hopelessly lost.

CHAPTER XIII

WESTBROOK often met the lawyer at the Barringtons' after that first visit. Martin's music and Martin's voice seemed to be unfailing attractions in the eyes of Miss Barrington. Westbrook studied his "lives" assiduously, but only once did he venture to take any part in the discussions of composers which were so frequent between Miss Barrington and the lawyer. That once was sufficient to show him how hopeless was the task he had set for himself; and ever after he kept a discreet silence on the subject of music and all that pertained thereto.

As the winter passed, Westbrook was seen more and more frequently in the company of Miss Barrington. His eye had lost its gloom and his step had gained a new springiness. Just why, Westbrook did not stop to consider. Indeed, the considering of anything was what the man most wished to avoid.

It was on a beautiful morning in May that he asked Miss Barrington to drive with him. The air that brushed his cheek was laden with the fragrance of green-growing things, and the girl at his side never seemed so altogether lovely. He let the reins loosen in his hands as he settled back for an hour of unalloyed enjoyment.

"I am particularly glad to take this ride today," remarked Miss Barrington, smiling into his eyes,

"for, as I go away tomorrow, I may not have another opportunity of enjoying one at present."

"What?" demanded Westbrook, suddenly sitting upright.

"I merely said I was going away tomorrow," she returned merrily, picking out with intuitive skill that portion of her remark which had so startled him. Then something in his face made her add—"for the summer, you know."

Westbrook pulled the reins taut and snapped the whip sharply. Going away! Of course; why not? What of it? Yes, what of it, indeed! Long days fraught with sudden emptiness loomed up before him and stretched on into weeks devoid of charm. He understood it all now—and he a felon! He could hear a girl's voice saying, "I knew you were a good man the first minute I saw your face!" Unconsciously he shrank into the corner of the carriage, and was only brought to a realization of his action by a voice—amused, yet slightly piqued—saying:

"Really, Mr. Westbrook, I hardly expected so simple a statement would render you speechless!"

"Speechless? No, oh, no—certainly not! I beg your pardon, I'm sure," he said, talking very fast. "You're going away, you tell me. It is needless to assure you that we shall all miss you very much. Where do you go, if I may ask—and how long are you to remain?" And he turned to her with eyes so full of misery that she could scarcely believe she had heard his words aright.

Before she could answer there came the wild, irregular clattering of unguided horses' feet. Westbrook turned quickly to see two frightened animals rushing toward them dragging a swaying empty car-

riage. By a swift and skilful turn he just escaped the collision, but Ethel Barrington felt the hot breath of the beasts as they flew past. In another moment their own startled horse had dashed after the runaways with speed scarcely less than their own.

Westbrook brought all his great strength to bear, then—the right rein snapped. The horse swerved sharply, throwing the man to his knees. The next moment he was crawling cautiously, but rapidly, over the dashboard on to the thill, then to the back of the frightened animal, where he could grasp the dangling broken reins. One strong pull, and the horse stopped so suddenly that the man shot over her head to the ground; but he did not relax his hold, and the trembling animal stood conquered.

Westbrook turned to look into the shining eyes of the girl, who had leaped from the carriage and come close to his side.

"Oh, that was wonderful! But—my God! I thought you'd be killed," she cried, holding out two trembling hands, then sinking to the ground and sobbing out her nervousness and relief.

The man looked down at her with yearningly tender eyes. Involuntarily he extended his hand as though to caress the bowed head; but he drew back shuddering—that hand had forfeited all right to such a touch. The look in her eyes had thrilled him to his finger-tips, but it as quickly stabbed him with the revelation that not he alone would suffer.

"Miss Barrington, don't, I beg of you," he said finally, in a voice that was stern with self-control. "You are completely unnerved—and no wonder." Then he continued more gently, "But see—Firefly

is quiet now. Will you dare to drive home behind her if I can manage somehow to mend the reins?"

A vivid color flamed in the girl's cheeks and she rose unsteadily to her feet.

"Yes, indeed," she asserted, forcing her trembling lips to speak firmly. "I am ashamed of myself. I hope you will pay no attention to my babyishness, Mr. Westbrook."

"You were not babyish, Miss Barrington," objected Westbrook gravely; "on the contrary you were very brave." But as he helped her into the carriage he averted his eyes and refused to meet her questioning gaze.

All the way home Ethel Barrington talked with a nervous volubility quite unlike herself. Westbrook made an effort to meet her brilliant sallies with something like an adequate return, but after two or three dismal failures he gave it up and lapsed into a gloomy silence broken only by an occasional short reply.

"I expect my friends will come this evening to say good-bye—I shall see you, shall I not?" she asked gaily as she gave him her hand in alighting at her own door.

Before Westbrook realized what the question fully was, he had murmured, "Yes, certainly"; but when he drove away he was muttering, "Fool, what possible good can it be to you now? Just suppose she knew you for what you are?"

Ethel entered her door and slowly climbed the stairs to her room.

"He cares; I know he does!" she exclaimed under her breath. "But why—why couldn't he——?" Then the conscious red, that was yet half in pique,

flamed into her cheeks and she shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

When Westbrook called that night she gave him a gracious hand and looked frankly into his eyes with the inward determination to "have no more nonsense"; but her eyelids quickly fell before his level gaze and she felt the telltale color burning in her cheeks. She was relieved when her father broke the awkward silence.

"Well, Westbrook, we shall miss you—we've got so we depend upon seeing you about once in so often. We shall be in Skinner Valley in August. You must plan to run down to The Maples and make us a visit. I should like to show you the mines."

"Thank you," replied Westbrook, glancing toward the door and, for the first time in his life, welcoming the appearance of Martin.

Martin advanced, smilingly sure of his welcome, nor did he notice that Miss Barrington's greeting was a shade less cordial than usual. His coming was the signal for the adjournment to the music-room, and there Westbrook sat with clouded eyes and unheeding ears while the air about him rang with melody. After a time he was conscious that the music had stopped and that Ethel was speaking.

"I think I never heard of anything so horrible!" she said.

From Martin's next words Westbrook gathered that they were talking of a particularly atrocious murder that had been committed in the city the night before. Then the girl spoke again, her voice vibrating with feeling.

"Oh, but Mr. Martin—only think of a human being fiendish enough to attack his own son!"

Westbrook tried to rouse himself, to speak, to

move; but he seemed bound by invisible cords. His head was turned away from the speakers, but he saw their reflection in the mirror facing him, and he noticed that the lawyer's gaze was fixed across the room upon himself with a peculiar intentness as he said:

"Yes, incredible, I grant, Miss Barrington; and yet, in a little New England town of my acquaintance a boy of twenty shot down his own father in cold blood at their own fireside."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Martin—the human fiend!" shuddered Ethel.

The lawyer's eyes did not waver; a strange light was coming into them.

"A human fiend, indeed," he repeated softly, half rising from his chair.

Something seemed to snap in Westbrook's brain, and he forced himself to his feet.

"Your music set me to day-dreaming," he began, with a smile as he crossed the room, "and your creepy murder stories awoke me to a realization that the sweet sounds had stopped. Come"—he looked straight into Martin's eyes—"sometime you may tell me more of this gruesome tale—I am interested in studies of human nature. No doubt you meet with many strange experiences in your business; but now I want you to sing 'Calvary' for me. Will you, please? Then I must go."

Martin rose to his feet with a puzzled frown on his face as he picked up a sheet of music from the piano.

"Thank you," said Westbrook, when the song was finished. Then he turned to Ethel with extended hand. "I hope you will have a pleasant summer," he said in stilted politeness.

"You are very kind. Shall I wish you the same?"

Her voice and her fingers were icy. Her pride was touched, and she expressed no hope as to their future meeting, and certainly Westbrook dared not. He left the house with a heart that was bitterly rebellious, and the blackness outside seemed to him symbolical of his own despair.

That night, and for long nights afterward, he rode over the hills outside the city. Little by little his life dropped back into the old rut. All the new warmth and brightness faded with the going of Miss Barrington, and he threw himself into business with a zeal that quickly brought "Westbrook & Company" into the front rank and filled his purse with yet greater wealth—wealth which he had come to hate, and for which he had no use.

CHAPTER XIV

ONE morning, long after sunrise, Westbrook entered the outskirts of the city and allowed his tired beast to slow to a walk. In one of the poorest streets of the tenement district he saw a white-faced woman, a group of half a dozen puny children and a forlorn heap of clothing and furniture. He was off his horse in a moment, and a few kindly questions brought out the information that they had been evicted for arrears in rent amounting to thirty dollars because the woman had been too ill to work. He straightway paid the sleek little agent not only the amount due, but also a year's rent in advance and rode away, followed by a volley of thanks and blessings from the woman. He did not know that Martin was the landlord and that he came out of the tenement in time to hear the details of the incident fresh from his agent.

As Westbrook turned the corner of the dingy street a curious elation took possession of him. How the sun shone—how exhilarating the air was! How his heart beat in tune with it all! What was this new joy that seemed almost to choke and suffocate him? Was this the shadow of peace at last?

He threw the reins to the groom with so beaming a smile that the man scratched his head meditatively for a full half-minute.

"Faith, an' what's got into the master?" he muttered as he led the horse to the stable.

In the days that followed society was treated to a new sensation—the Mystery had turned into a Philanthropist. A school, a library and a hospital were under way in a wonderfully short time. Did Westbrook hear of anyone wanting anything—from a toy to a piano or a dinner to an education—he promptly bought and presented it. The result was disastrous. There came a constant stream of beggars to his door, varying from those in rags asking a nickel to bank presidents demanding a million—for “investment,” of course; furthermore, he was obliged to hire two private secretaries to attend to his mail.

In August came a cordial note from Mr. Barrington inviting him to The Maples for a two weeks' visit. The stiffly worded refusal which Westbrook despatched by return mail threw John Barrington into a state of puzzled dissatisfaction, and John Barrington's daughter into a feeling of unreasoning anger against the world in general and Joseph Westbrook in particular. The anger was not less when, two months later, Westbrook called on the Barringtons just four weeks after they had come up to their town residence in Dalton.

It was not a pleasant call. Westbrook was stilted, Mr. Barrington plainly ill at ease, and Ethel, the personification of chill politeness; yet she became cordiality itself when Martin appeared a little later. She chatted and laughed with the lawyer and sent merry shafts of wit across the room to Westbrook and her father. But when Westbrook had gone she lapsed into bored indifference and monosyllables.

Mr. Barrington was called from the room after a time, leaving his daughter and Martin alone. The lawyer broached subject after subject with unvary-

ing ill success, even music itself failing to awaken more than a passing interest. At last he said abruptly:

"Queer chap—that Westbrook!"

"Queer? Why?" almost snapped Miss Barrington.

Martin raised his eyebrows.

"How can you ask?" he returned. "You've seen him—you know him!"

Miss Barrington gave the lawyer a swift glance. Just what did he mean? Had he noticed the change in Westbrook's manner—his indifference—his coldness? Did he think that she——?

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Martin, I do know him—slightly, perhaps; but 'queer' is not the adjective I would have applied to him."

The lawyer leaned forward.

"Miss Barrington, *what* do you know of him? Did it ever occur to you how very little any of us know of this man?"

The lady stirred uneasily.

"Really, Mr. Martin, I know him for a gentleman, as you do—I might also add that he is quite a noted philanthropist, of late," she added teasingly.

"'Philanthropist!'" scoffed the lawyer.

Miss Barrington's manner instantly changed.

"Mr. Westbrook is doing a world of good with his money; I admire him for it," she said with decision.

"Oh, of course," returned the man smoothly. "Still, I wonder why—this sudden generosity!"

"Sudden? It's a long time since I first heard of Mr. Westbrook's good deeds, Mr. Martin," replied Miss Barrington, a vision of Pedler Jim and his hospital rising before her eyes.

"H'm-m," murmured the lawyer, his level gaze on

her face, "you knew him before, perhaps—this man they—er—call 'Westbrook.'"

The lady sprang to her feet and crossed the room to the piano.

"Oh, fie, Mr. Lawyer!" she laughed nervously. "I'm no poor victim on the witness stand. Come—let's try this duet."

The man followed her and leaned his elbow on the piano, but he did not pick up the music nor take his eyes from her face.

"You have known him before, then—under his other name, of course," he hazarded.

A swift red came into Ethel's cheeks.

"Perhaps—perhaps not! I really do not care to discuss it." And she wheeled around upon the piano-stool and dashed into the prelude of the duet.

Martin waited until her hands had glided into the soft ripple of the accompaniment.

"Then you, of all people, Miss Barrington," he began again, "should know that this philanthropic mummary is nothing but a salve for his conscience. Admirable, I'm sure!"

The music stopped with a crash.

"What do you mean?" she demanded. "I don't know what you are talking about, with your miserable innuendoes."

Martin's face paled.

"Innuendoes!" he burst out, losing his temper; "then I'll speak plainly, since you demand it! Since when, Miss Barrington, have you made a practice of shielding—murderers?"

He regretted the word the instant it had left his lips, but he forced himself to meet Miss Barrington's horrified gaze unflinchingly.

"Murderer!" she gasped. "Hustler Joe was no murderer!"

At that moment Mr. Barrington re-entered the room and Martin turned to him in relief. Five minutes later he had made his adieus and left the house.

CHAPTER XV

MURDERER!

Ethel fled to her room and locked the door, but the word laughed at bolts and bars. It looked from the walls and the pictures and peeped at her from the pages of the book she tried to read. She opened the window and gazed up at the stars, but they, too, knew the hated word and spelled it out in twinkling points of light.

Murderer?

Ah, no, it could not be—and yet——

Away back in Ethel's memory was a picture of the Deerfield Woods that skirted the lawn at The Maples. She saw the tall, grave-faced miner and the imperious girl, and even now the words rang in her ears—"I'm not the good man you think, Miss Barrington!" Half-forgotten tales of "Hustler Joe's queerness" came to her, too, and assumed an appearance of evil.

And was this to be the explanation of that ride—that ride on which she had almost betrayed herself only to be met by stern words of conventionality? Was this the meaning of the infrequent calls, the averted face, the eyes so misery-laden if by chance they met her own?

A murderer?

"Ah, no, no! He was so good—so kind—so brave! There were Pedler Jim, the miners whose lives he had saved, and the multitudes of the city's poor to

give the lie to so base a charge; and yet—Martin had said that these very benefactions were but a lullaby to a guilty conscience.

The night brought Ethel no relief. The dark was peopled with horrid shapes; and sleep, when it came, was dream-haunted and unrefreshing. In the morning, weary and heavy-eyed, she awoke to a day of restless wandering from room to room. Twenty-four hours later her trunk was packed and she was on her way to The Maples.

It was at about this time that Westbrook's philanthropy took a new turn. He began to spend long hours in the city prison while society looked on and shuddered disdainful shoulders. The striped-garbed creatures behind the bars seemed to possess a peculiar fascination for him. He haunted their habitation daily, yet he never failed to shudder at every clang of the iron doors.

Particularly was he kind to those outcasts from human sympathy—the murderers. So far did he carry this branch of his charity that the authorities ventured to remonstrate with the great man one day, telling him that he was putting a premium on the horrible crime. They never forgot the look that came over the beneficent Mr. Joseph Westbrook's face as he turned and walked away.

It was on that night that the servants said he sat up until morning in his library, raging around the room like some mad creature, so that they were all afraid, and one came and listened at the door. There he heard his master cry out:

"My God—is it not enough? Is there no atonement—no peace?" Then there was a long quivering sigh, and a noise as of a clinched hand striking the

desk, and a low muttered, "Oh, the pitiless God of Justice!"

In the morning Westbrook left the house before breakfast and boarded the eight o'clock train for Skinner Valley.

CHAPTER XVI

WESTBROOK had gone back to Skinner Valley for a talk with Pedler Jim, having it in his mind to tell the little hunchback his life story as that of a friend of his and so get the benefit of sound advice without quite betraying his secret. But the door opened suddenly and Bill Somers burst into the store.

"There's another blow-up at the mine!" he gasped thickly. "An' the old man's daughter—she——"

"What old man's daughter?" demanded Westbrook, his lips white.

"She—Barrington's girl—is down there in that hell! She went in with her friends at two o'clock. They——"

"Which entrance?" thundered Westbrook, with his hand on the door.

"Beachmont! They——"

Westbrook dashed down the steps and across the sidewalk, slipped out his knife and cut loose a horse from the shafts of a wagon in front of the store. The next moment he had mounted the animal and was urging it into a mad run toward the Beachmont entrance of the Candria mine.

Again did he face a crowd of weeping women and children crazed with terror; but this time there stood among them the bowed form of the great mine-king himself. John Barrington's lips were stern and set, and only his eyes spoke as he grasped Westbrook's hand.

Once more did a band of heroic men work their way bit by bit into the mine, fighting the damp at every turn under Westbrook's directions.

Barrington had looked at the preparations in amazement.

"How comes it that this Westbrook, this millionaire, knows the mine so well?" he stammered.

A woman standing near him—Bill Somer's wife—answered him.

"That's Hustler Joe, sir," she said softly.

Hustler Joe! John Barrington drew a deep breath as the memories of the Bonanza catastrophe came to him.

"Thank God for Hustler Joe!" he breathed fervently. "If anyone can save my little girl, 'tis he!"

"You're right, sir—an' he'll do it, too," returned the little woman, her eyes full of unshed tears.

CHAPTER XVII

SLOWLY, so slowly, the rescuers worked their way into the mine. One by one the unconscious forms of the miners were borne back to fresh air and safety. But no trace could be found of Miss Barrington and her band of sightseers.

At last, far down a gallery, Westbrook heard a faint cry. With an answering shout of reassurance he dashed ahead of the others and came face to face with Ethel Barrington.

"You!" she cried.

"Yes, yes; you're not hurt?"

She shook her head and leaned heavily against the wall. The reaction was making her head swim.

"And your friends?"

"Here"—she pointed to the ground almost at her feet. "They're not hurt—they fainted."

Stalwart miners poured into the narrow chamber and lifted the prostrate forms, leaving Westbrook with Miss Barrington. That young lady still leaned against the wall.

"I—we should be going; can you—let me help you," stammered Westbrook.

"Oh, I can walk," she laughed nervously, making a vain attempt to steady her limbs as she moved slowly away from her support.

Westbrook caught her outstretched hand and passed his disengaged arm around her waist.

"Miss Barrington, you're quite unnerved," he said, his voice suddenly firm. "Pardon me, but you

must accept my assistance." And he half carried, half led her down the long gallery, at the end of which they could hear the steps and voices of their companions.

All the misery of the last few days fled from Ethel's mind. She was conscious only of the strength and bravery and tenderness of the man at her side. Martin's hated words became as phantoms of a past existence.

"You—you haven't told me how you came to be here today, Mr. Westbrook," she began again, a little hysterically. "I thought you were in Dalton."

"I came down this morning," he said. Then added softly, "Thank God!"

Ethel was silent for a moment. When she spoke again her voice shook.

"As usual, Mr. Westbrook—you are near when I need you! If I am ever in danger again, I shall promptly look for you. Now see that you do not disappoint me!" she added with assumed playfulness, trying to hide her depth of feeling.

They had almost reached the turn when a distant rumble and vibrating crash shook the walls about them, throwing Westbrook and Miss Barrington to the ground. It was some time before the man could stagger to his feet and help his companion to stand upright.

"What—what was it?" she gasped.

Westbrook advanced two steps only to come sharply against a wall of earth and timbers.

"My God—the roof is fallen!" he cried.

She came close to his side.

"Then there was another explosion?"

"Yes."

"But they will find us?"

"That wall may be——" he stopped abruptly.

"Many feet in thickness, I know," she supplied.

"And the damp—if it should enter the gallery from the rear—his voice choked into silence.

"I know—I understand. But we are together!" She laid her hand on his arm.

He caught the hand and held it in both his own, then slowly raised it and laid the soft palm against his lips.

"Ethel—Ethel—may God forgive me!" he whispered brokenly.

She swayed dizzily, and he caught and held her close.

"I—I think I am going to faint," she murmured. "I——"

His arms tightened their clasp and her head drooped until it lay in the hollow of his shoulder.

"Ethel, darling—only one little word! Ah, sweetheart—I've loved you so!"

She raised her hand and just touched his cheek with her fingers, then let her arm fall about his neck. His head bent low and his lips closed over hers as she drew a long, quivering sigh.

"May God forgive me," he breathed, "but 'tis the end—the end!"

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Ethel Barrington regained consciousness she was in her own bed at The Maples, but it was full two days after that before they let her ask questions that so often came to her lips. It was her father who finally answered her.

"Yes, dear, you were unconscious when the miners found you. Westbrook could barely speak. Why, girlie, when that second crash came and the miners realized that Hustler Joe—as they insist upon calling that remarkable man—was himself imprisoned, they swarmed into the mine like ants and attacked the fallen wall like madmen! Those that had no pickaxe clawed at the dirt and stones with their naked fingers!"

"And—Mr. Westbrook?"

"Is all right and has been here every day to inquire for you and to bring you these," replied Mr. Barrington, with a wave of his hand toward the sumptuous red roses on the table.

The girl's eyes lingered on the flowers and her cheeks suddenly glowed with a reflection of their vivid color.

"He is very kind," she murmured as she turned her face away.

For a week Westbrook and his roses made daily calls. At the end of that time it was reported to him that Miss Barrington was feeling quite like herself. The next morning Westbrook did not appear, but his roses came in charge of a boy together with a note for Miss Barrington.

The Atonement of Hustler Joe 101

The missive bore no date, no salutation, but plunged at once into its message.

That I should address you at all is an insult, but my cowardly weakness when we were last together makes it a greater insult for me to keep silence now. I have waited until you were quite recovered before giving you this, for I know that it will give you pain—and that it *will* give you pain is at once my greatest curse and my greatest joy. That I should have dared to love you is despicable, but that I should have allowed you to give me even one tender thought in return is dastardly—and yet, nothing in heaven or hell can take from me the ecstasy of that one moment when your dear lips met mine!

Forgive me—think kindly of me if you can, for—God help me—I am going away, never to look on your face again. I was a boy of twenty when I committed the sin against God and man that has made my life a thing of horror. For years I have sought for peace; adventure, work, wealth, philanthropy—each alike has failed to bring it. I am going now to my boyhood's home to receive my just punishment.

Ah, Ethel, Ethel, my lost love—what can I say to you? I have but words—words—empty words! I can see the horror in your dear eyes. I am not worthy of even the thought of you, and yet, my darling, oh, my darling, were it not for this dread shadow on my life, I swear I would win you for my darling in very truth!

But now—God help me—farewell!

“Poor fellow! He would not sign ‘Westbrook’ and he would not sign—the other.”

Much to John Barrington's amazement, his daughter insisted upon going to town on the noon train that day. In response to his persistent objections she assured him that she felt “perfectly well and quite equal to a journey around the world, if necessary.”

At four o'clock Lawyer Martin was surprised by an urgent note summoning him to the Barringtons' Dalton residence on Howard Avenue. Half an hour afterward he was ushered into the presence of Miss Barrington herself.

The interview was short, sharp and straight to the point. A few hours later Miss Barrington and her maid boarded the eight o'clock express for the East.

CHAPTER XIX

TWENTY-FOUR hours had passed after Westbrook had sent his letter to Miss Barrington before he could so arrange his affairs as to start for the little New England village of his boyhood. All day and all night he had worked with feverish haste, and the time had flown on wings of the wind; now, when he was at last on the morning "Limited," the hours seemed to drag as though weighted with lead.

He could see it all—the proud new name he had made for himself dragged low in the dust. He knew just how society would wonder and surmise; just how the maneuvering mammas would shake their skirts in virtuous indignation and how the doting papas would nod their heads in congratulation over a miraculous escape.

He knew how the poor and friendless in the great city would first deny the charge, then weep over the truth. He knew, too, the look that would come to the faces of the miners, and he winced at the thought of this—Hustler Joe had prized his place in the hearts of his miner friends.

There was one on whom he dared not let his thoughts rest for a moment; yet it was that one's face which seemed ever before his eyes, and it was that one's voice which constantly rang in his ears.

Again the sun had set and it was twilight in the little New England village. The street had not

changed much—the houses were grayer and the trees taller, perhaps.

As he neared the familiar gate, he saw in the window the face of a silver-haired woman. Was that his mother—his dearly beloved mother of long ago? She turned her head and he was answered.

After all, would it not be better to pass on and away again, rather than to bow that gray head once more in grief and shame?

His steps lagged and he almost passed the gate. Then he drew a long breath, turned sharply, strode up the path and pulled the bell.

The sweet-faced woman opened the door. The man's dry lips parted, but no sound came, for from an inner room advanced Ethel Barrington with a gray-haired man whose kindly face wore a strangely familiar smile.

"What is it, wife? Is it—Paul?" he asked in tremulous tones.

EPILOGUE

IT was long hours afterward that Paul Joseph Weston sat with Ethel alone in the library.

"But yourself, dear—you have not told me yet how you came to be here," he said.

She laughed softly.

"Rash boy! Was there not need of someone's preparing your father and mother for so wonderful a home-coming? I found out by judicious inquiry that you had not yet left the city, so I knew, when I took the train, that I had at least a few hours start of you."

"But how—what—how could you, dear? Surely I didn't tell——"

Again she laughed, but this time she dimpled into a rosy blush.

"When your very disquieting letter came, sir, I remembered something Mr. Martin had once said to me. I went to town, sent for Mr. Martin and insisted upon his telling me all that he knew of—your youth."

"And that was?"

"That he believed you to be Paul Weston, who had quarreled with his father and run away after apparently killing the poor gentleman. Mr. Martin said that the father did not die, but slowly recovered from his wound and made every possible effort to find his son, even sending Martin himself to seek for him. Once Martin traced the boy to a mining camp, but there he lost the trail and never regained it until

he thought he saw Paul Weston's features in Joseph Westbrook's face."

"Ethel, what did Martin first tell you of me that caused you to go to him for aid?"

"He hinted that you were a—ah, don't make me say it, please!"

The man's face grew stern.

"And he knew all the time it was false!" he cried. She put a soft finger on his tense lips.

"We just won't think of him—and really, I've forgiven him long ago, for it was he that helped me in the end, you know. Besides, he acknowledged that he didn't really suppose you were Paul Weston. I—I fancy he didn't want me to think too highly of this interesting Mr. Joseph Westbrook!" she added saucily.

The arm that held her tightened its clasp.

"He needn't have worried," she continued, with uptilted chin. "I shall never, never marry Mr. Joseph Westbrook!"

"Ethel!"

"But if Hustler Joe or Paul Weston should ask——"

Her lips were silenced by a kiss and a fervent, "You little fraud of a sweetheart!"

II: TANGLED

II: TANGLED

CHAPTER I

IT was a distinct annoyance to Mrs. Charles Martingale to write a letter; hence she did it but seldom—annoyances and Molly Martingale were not on intimate terms. When Caroline Sanderson wrote, however, that she was about to make her home in Hampdon, Mrs. Martingale suddenly bethought herself of a childhood's friend also in Hampdon—rich, socially prominent, and with a highly eligible son.

What more altogether delightful than that Paul Carew should eventually have the handling of the Sanderson millions? At all events, it would be pleasant for Caroline to know Mrs. Jack Carew and her good-looking son, even should nothing come of it, decided Mrs. Martingale; and it was then that she crossed to her desk and took out her note-paper.

The letter was not long, but it covered four pages, so coarse was the penmanship. When it left Mrs. Martingale's hands, it was intended by its writer to be read thus:

First page of note paper.

MY DEAR NELL:

Surprised at a letter from me, aren't you? I'm a poor correspondent, I know, but a young friend of mine has moved to your town, and I want you to call and be nice to her. She is Caroline Sanderson, of a fine family, rich, an orphan, and, you'll say, a bit spoiled.

Third page of note paper.

I don't know very much about her except that, but I knew and loved her mother years ago. I fancy you'll be quick and see the possibilities of the situation, however, as you have a marriageable son on your hands. By the way, is Paul at home now?

Second page of note paper.

Caroline has with her, Barbara, her Uncle John's daughter, and has taken a house—I enclose address—installing an aunt, a Mrs. Chetwood, I believe, as chaperon. Barbara Sanderson is distractingly pretty and wins every masculine heart, poor though she is.

Fourth page of note paper.

I was interrupted just here, my dear, but after all, I had about finished. Oh, one thing, however. I have just learned something that will keep your "possibilities" from ever becoming probabilities—she's engaged! It's a secret, so don't tell.

Very lovingly,

MOLLY.

This was what Mrs. Martingale had intended to say; but when Helen Carew in Hampdon read the letter, it's message was quite different. Molly Martingale never troubled to number pages, and she had a habit of skipping about on the sheet as the whim of the moment dictated. In this letter she had begun on the first page, turned the leaf and covered the third, intending to go back to the second and write lengthwise from the bottom to the top. When that page was reached, however, she forgot, and still wrote from side to side; then turned, and finished on the fourth.

To Helen Carew, a letter that skipped about was an abomination; but when this one came, with no hated lengthwise writing to mar the symmetry of the pages, she had no hesitation in reading straight through from the first word to the last. So, to her, the letter read thus:

MY DEAR NELL:

Surprised at a letter from me, aren't you? I'm a poor correspondent, I know, but a young friend of mine has moved to your town, and I want you to call and be nice to her. She is Caroline Sanderson, of a fine family, rich, an orphan, and, you'll say, a bit spoiled.

Caroline has with her, Barbara, her Uncle John's daughter, and has taken a house—I enclose address—installing an aunt, a Mrs. Chetwood, I believe, as chaperon. Barbara Sanderson is distractingly pretty and wins every masculine heart, poor though she is.

I don't know very much about her except that, but I knew and loved her mother years ago. I fancy you'll be quick to see the possibilities of the situation, however, as you have a marriageable son on your hands. By the way, is Paul at home now?

I was interrupted just here, my dear, but after all I had about finished. Oh, one thing, however, I have just learned something that will keep your "possibilities" from ever becoming probabilities—she's engaged! It's a secret, so don't tell.

Very lovingly,

MOLLY.

"Hm-m," murmured Mrs. Jack Carew, as she folded the letter, not realizing that it was her blunder of mixing the pages that had caused the "possibilities" to refer to Barbara instead of to Caroline. Thus Barbara was reported to be engaged when it should have been Caroline.

"Hm-m"; repeated Mrs. Carew, this time with a smile, "up to her match-making, as usual! As if I

couldn't read between the lines, particularly when she openly warns me against the impecunious Barbara, and then assures me in the next breath that, after all, I needn't worry, for the fascinating young woman is already spoken for!"

Mrs. Carew always talked to herself when she was interested, and she was very much interested just now.

"And it would be a good thing—a fine thing," she continued, nodding her head gently. "I've heard of this Caroline Sanderson. Dick Bartlett saw her a year ago in Paris, and if she's anything as he made her out, she ought to be able to stir Paul from his indifference; if she does do it, it'll be more than any other girl ever did."

"What's more than any other girl ever did," inquired an amused voice from the doorway.

"Paul!" exclaimed Mrs. Carew. "How you startled me!"

The man laughed and entered the room.

"My dear mother, if you will carry on a whole afternoon-tea all by yourself, what can you expect?"

"Did you—hear?" she demanded.

"Only the last few words," he laughed. "I'm looking for a book," he added, as he moved leisurely around the room. "I think I left it here last night."

"Oh!" said his mother; and fell to watching him with fond eyes.

She noted the tall, powerfully built figure, the well-set head, the firm mouth and the determined, smooth-shaven chin. Now, as often before, it came to her that, in his presence, her spindle-legged sofas and fragile vases appeared absurd; his virile personality seemed to demand Morris chairs and bronze statues. From stand to table, and from table to

piano she watched him. She knew quite well where the book was, but she would not say; it merely was one way to keep this big, stalwart son of hers as long as possible before her adoring eyes.

CHAPTER II

NOT many days after the arrival of Molly Martingale's letter, Mrs. Jack Carew's victoria stopped at the door of the house Caroline Sanderson had taken for the winter.

"It might be well," mused Mrs. Carew, as she ascended the steps, "to be a bit wary of this fascinating Barbara, even though she is engaged. Engagements are brittle things sometimes—and this might be one of the times!"

Mrs. Chetwood received the visitor with marked cordiality, and introduced her two nieces with a vain attempt at hiding her joy over this gracious attention from Mrs. Jack Carew.

Was Mrs. Chetwood disconcerted? Did she stumble over the names, "Miss Caroline Sanderson" and "Miss Barbara Sanderson?" There certainly was some confusion as the tall blonde and the petite brunette came forward with smiling grace. Did Mrs. Jack Carew bow ever so little more impressively over the slim fingers of the taller girl, and did she listen just a bit more deferentially when this same golden-haired, blue-eyed young woman spoke?

"I've heard much of you," she said to her after the first greetings. "Dick Bartlett—you knew him in Paris, didn't you?—told me all about the delightful little group of Americans he met there."

A bright red flushed the girl's cheeks. Her lips parted, but before she could speak, her cousin asked:

"And is he here now?—Mr. Bartlett, I mean."

There was almost a reproof in the very turn of Mrs. Carew's head.

"No," she said, with a cold smile. "Mr. Bartlett has gone to the Far East as war correspondent for the *Eagle*."

Again the lips of the taller girl parted, and again the young woman at Mrs. Carew's right interposed a remark. This time she led the conversation by an adroit turn to a point far distant from Mr. Richard Bartlett and his Paris experiences, nor was the gentleman mentioned again during the call.

Mrs. Jack Carew was scarcely seated in her carriage, however, before, in Caroline's own room, the blue eyes flashed a troubled question into the brown.

"Caroline, why did you do that?" demanded Barbara. "You didn't give me a chance to explain. Mrs. Carew thinks I'm you—I know she does. When she spoke about Mr. Bartlett she turned to me—not you; and I never even saw Mr. Bartlett. There were other things, too—lots of them!"

Barbara's face was flushed. She spoke hurriedly, yet with evident restraint.

The dark-eyed little woman opposite shrugged her shoulders.

"Yes, I noticed," she said demurely.

"But, Caroline, I was so distressed!"

"I wasn't."

"But when she finds out next time, it will be so awkward!"

"So it will—if she does," agreed Caroline with mock impressiveness. "Suppose we don't let her find out next time."

"Caroline!"

"There, there, Barbara," coaxed Caroline, "don't look so dismayed. You don't half-appreciate the

joke. You were the rich Miss Sanderson. As for me—her ladyship quite disapproves of me,” finished Caroline, with a tilt of her chin.

“Oh, no—not that,” demurred Barbara, feebly.

“And so I’m going to keep it up,” continued Caroline, as if she had not heard.

“Keep—it—up!” gasped the other.

Caroline nodded gleefully.

“My dear, don’t you see?” she cried. “We won’t have to do a thing. Mrs. Jack Carew—bless her heart!—will do it all. You’re ‘Miss Sanderson’—so am I; that’s the way we shall be known at present. Hampdon won’t call us ‘Barbara’ and ‘Caroline’ just yet, you know, and our kind visitor of this afternoon will scatter it broadcast that the tall blonde is Caroline the millionairess and that the short brunette is Barbara, the poor cousin, and—there you are!” she concluded, with a sweep of her hands.

“But we’ll be found out!”

“Of course—in time; but the longer it’s put off the more fun it’ll be.”

“But—there’s Aunt Emily.”

“Humph! Just as if I couldn’t train her!” scoffed Caroline. “You know very well if I asked for a particular star, she’d order a stepladder built at once tall enough to reach it. Besides, if her conscience is too troublesome, she has only to call us by our pet names ‘Puss,’ and ‘Kit,’ and no one will be the wiser.”

“But people—other folks!”

“I don’t know a soul in Hampdon.”

“There’s Mr. Bartlett.”

“Pooh!—he’s away. Time enough to worry about him when he gets here. Besides, the fun will be all over long before he comes.”

"But it seems so absurd—so dime-novelish!"

"That's exactly why I want to do it," retorted Caroline. "Girls in books are always palming themselves off as other people. I want to see how it works in real life. It will be such fun to watch fond mammas with marriageable sons snub me. Oh, Barbara, I could just hug that Mrs. Carew for putting me up to it!"

"But when it is found out, Caroline, how do you think we'll figure?" demanded Barbara, indignantly.

Caroline shrugged her shoulders.

"Don't you worry, my dear. It will pass as 'a delightfully original whim of that rich Miss Caroline Sanderson's' then. I know them! Besides," she went on airily, "I really have no choice in the matter. Mrs. Carew has the whole thing in her own hands. Surely, my dear, you wouldn't want me to go around on our first appearance in society, saying: 'There is a mistake, you know. I am the rich Miss Sanderson, and that tall, light-haired girl is only my poor cousin!'"

"Oh, Caroline, Caroline, how you do put things!" groaned Barbara. "I verily believe you could make me think it quite the proper thing to walk backwards down the avenue as a daily exercise, if once you set your mind to it. I do, indeed!"

Some hours later Mrs. Jack Carew said to an intimate friend:

"I called on that rich young Miss Sanderson, to-day—the one Dick Bartlett raved over last year. I thought he fell particularly captive to her dark eyes, but I must have been quite mistaken, for her eyes are blue, and her hair looks like spun gold. She's tall, and has lots of style. There's a cousin—an inoffensive little brown thing, pretty in her way;

but she won't cut much figure when her cousin, Caroline, is around, I fancy—though I've heard she's quite a fascinator, after all."

And thus were Miss Barbara Sanderson and Miss Caroline Sanderson described, and thus, a little later, were they introduced to Mrs. Jack Carew's friends.

CHAPTER III

IN due course Mrs. Carew invited the Sanderson girls to dinner. There were others present, and all, with an alacrity that made Caroline's brown eyes flash with delight, paid special homage to the tall, fair-haired girl in pale blue.

That blue gown, which Barbara wore so charmingly, had cost Caroline more than money—it had cost her the hardest-fought battle of her life.

"Now, my dear girl," she had said one day to Barbara, "do be reasonable! You like pretty things as well as I. You are my cousin. You love silks and jewels and laces all the more ardently because you've had to wear calicoes and ginghamms so much of the time. Your father staid at home and took care of the old folks; my father went off and got rich. Now part of that money belongs by right to you. Even if we weren't playing this little game of ours, Barbara, I should just make you take part of your money—mind you, your money—and spend it for gowns. I've danced, and dined, and motored with all Paris for a playground, while you've been cooped up with the chickens in a country town. Now come—I'm going shopping!"

That was but one of the many pleas which had finally brought Barbara to terms. Now she reveled in the soft fabrics and gleaming jewels, and gave herself unreservedly into Caroline's hands. The result was a delight to all eyes; so when she walked into dinner that night at Mrs. Carew's, leaning on

the arm of the son of the house, Mrs. Carew herself looked on with keen approval.

"Hm-m; she just suits him," thought the lady. "That fair hair, and graceful poise of the head are wonderfully attractive. Paul may count himself lucky."

At that moment, had she but known it, Paul was counting himself anything but lucky. For the last week he had heard altogether too much of this young woman at his side. Her beauty, her wealth, her consummate desirability had been sung by others if not openly by his mother. He understood, now, that lady's somewhat diplomatic remarks of the last few days. "Miss Caroline Sanderson" had not been the first young woman of capital and comeliness concerning whom Mrs. Carew had made such remarks. He glanced down at his companion—at the beautiful face, the gleaming jewels, and the soft blue of the gown. "The usual type!" he thought. Aloud he said:

"How do you like Hampdon, Miss Sanderson?"

"Oh, very much."

The man was conscious of a start of surprise. He had expected a listless, bored, perfunctory reply, akin to the question that had called it forth. This was concise and low-spoken, but full of unmistakable enthusiasm. He asked her another question, then another, just to hear that same enthusiasm vibrating through the answers. He was becoming interested, when suddenly it occurred to him that this was Miss Caroline Sanderson, rich, sought after, and toadied to by all his friends. He stiffened, and the old mask of indifference fell over his countenance.

Barbara was conscious of the change at once. "Dear me, now what have I done? Caroline would

say I'd been 'queer' as usual, I suppose; and it's Paul Carew, too. Dear, dear, she'll be vexed. I must make amends."

To "make amends," in Barbara's idea, was to chat, laugh, and revel in society's small talk; so she set about her task with an eagerness that was destined to atone for the past shortcomings. It resulted in Carew's bowing her from the dining-room a little later with the mental verdict: "Flippant and commonplace like the rest. That bit of individuality was a mere flash in the pan."

When Carew joined the ladies in the drawing-room he did not enter the admiring circle around his late dinner-partner. He crossed the room to where Caroline sat looking at some photographs.

"May I show those to you, Miss Sanderson?" he asked.

"Thank you," murmured Caroline. "You are very kind."

One by one they went over the photographs; he, a painfully attentive host; she, a punctiliously polite guest. It was after a long silence that she glanced up to find him moodily gazing across the room.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Carew," she hazarded finally, with demure patience.

A dull red flushed the man's cheeks.

"I beg your pardon. That was inexcusable of me. Suppose we take the other portfolio."

"I made you a proposition," returned Caroline, with a merry smile.

"A—proposition?"

"Perhaps my offer wasn't large enough to be tempting," pursued Caroline. "Perhaps they're worth more."

"I beg—oh, I understand," he broke off, with a

short laugh. Then he shook his head. "No, they're not worth even a penny," he said gravely. His eyes had grown somber; they were fixed on Barbara and her satellites.

"My thoughts were quite out of tune with the whole thing," he went on. "In fact, when you know more of me, you are bound to hear that I am always out of tune with a thing of this sort. You will hear that I am odd, opinionated, and—were it not for my name and my mother—quite impossible all round."

"Really! all that?" laughed Caroline, softly. "But that only excites my curiosity the more. What were those mystical, inharmonious thoughts? I'm not a bit afraid of them."

He looked down at her half-mocking, half-serious face, and his own changed.

"I will tell you," he said impulsively. "I was wondering if money would spoil you as it does—well, your cousin across the room, for instance."

In spite of herself, Caroline gave a sudden exclamation and changed color.

"There, now don't you wish you hadn't asked me?" he demanded.

"Not a bit of it!" retorted Caroline promptly, quite herself again. "To prove it, I'm going deeper. Just why do you call my cousin spoiled, if you please? After that we'll explore my case, perhaps. Do you—know her?"

"Not at all; only the type and the signs. For instance——"

"Ah, here you are, Miss Sanderson," interposed Mrs. Carew, who, with two ladies had borne down upon them from across the room. "I have some friends here I want you to meet."

Five minutes after the introductions Paul Carew bowed himself away. His mother smiled. Not for nothing had she been so suddenly anxious that the "fascinating Barbara" should make some new acquaintances.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIETY was not long in becoming interested in all the Sandersons, particularly in the tall, golden-haired girl, reputed owner of the Sanderson millions. The glamour surrounding her even reached so far as to include the brown-eyed, brown-haired cousin, who was pronounced a "nice little thing, but just a bit too independent for her position, don't you know." Calls and invitations poured in upon them in a flood, and the two girls soon found themselves with but few waking hours to call their own.

At first Barbara was in terror over their "little game" as Caroline termed it, and she was momentarily alarmed lest her false position be discovered; but, as the days passed and nothing disquieting happened, she became easier in her mind, and at times even forgot all about it, so unquestioningly had their positions been accepted by their new friends.

"After all," she sighed to herself, "it's my one good time; I'm going to take everything lovely that's in it. It's only for now, and 'twon't last."

Accordingly she reveled in the music, lights, and flower-scented rooms; even the flash of her jewels and the soft swish of her silks bringing keen joy to her beauty-starved soul.

Her enthusiasm for everything from a shopping trip to a cotillion brought blank amazement into the faces of her companions; but very shortly this same enthusiasm became known as "Miss Caroline

Sanderson's refreshingly high spirits." Her gracious acceptance of all homage, and her flattering delight in everything done for her enjoyment, led to the universal verdict of "Quite unspoiled by her wealth, don't you know," and her frequent unconventionalities and ever present frankness became known as "charming originality."

All this the brown eyes saw, and seeing, gleamed with mischief. Caroline tried to be very demure these days. She told Barbara she was endeavoring to remember her "place." She never said that but once, however, so fierce was the battle that came after it.

"But, my dear girl," laughed Caroline, "I'm not doing anything, am I? We'll just have to let matters take their course. I can't very well announce through the society columns—'If you please, I, Caroline Sanderson, small and a brunette, want more attention paid to me and less to my tall, beautiful cousin. I'm rich and she's poor.' Sound pretty! wouldn't it? Besides," with her old airiness, "how do you know it's the money that makes people so nice to you? Maybe they like you better than they do me. Stranger things than that have happened, my dear!"

And Barbara could only sigh, and exclaim, and sigh again, while Caroline laughed contentedly.

As time passed, people grew used to seeing Paul Carew with the dark-eyed little woman known—in Hampdon—as Barbara Sanderson. He had always been called "odd," and it seemed now quite the natural thing that he should set himself against Society's leadership and ignore the claims of the fair haired cousin, preferring to bend his energies toward entertaining the less popular one of the two.

To society in general—which made a pretty shrewd guess at Mrs. Carew's ambitions for her son—the case presented cause for amusement; to Mrs. Carew in particular, the whole thing was deplorable. Still under the delusion that the engagement, which she felt in duty bound to keep, was Barbara's, not Caroline's, and also still under the delusion that this same Barbara was the brown-eyed, brown-haired girl who had apparently made good Mrs. Molly Martingale's words by ensnaring Paul Carew's heart—Mrs. Carew could see only disaster ahead.

To remonstrate with her son was out of the question; Mrs. Carew knew his temperament and his abhorrence of the fortune-hunter far too well to attempt it. Interference with plans and interruption of tête-à-têtes must be accomplished with great tact to avoid detection, otherwise, the somewhat stubborn will of this same son of hers would be irrevocably set against the golden haired, golden haloed prize she so desired for him.

Everywhere and always the two girls went together; and everywhere and always the admiring throng around the tall, radiant blonde swept the little brunette to the outer fringe of the circle, whence Paul Carew as inevitably rescued her. And all the while his mother could but smile, and hide her chagrin.

It was some days before New Year's that Caroline Sanderson sprained her right ankle just severely enough to oblige her to keep from using it for a little time. When Mrs. Carew heard of this she thought deeply for a few minutes, then hurried to her desk and wrote two notes—one to Miss Caroline Sanderson, one to Miss Barbara Sanderson.

Some hours later, in accordance with their present

custom concerning city notes and messages, each opened the envelope addressed to the other.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Barbara, as she glanced the note through to the signature. "I've always wanted to see Mrs. Carew's country-place, and a winter week-end visit must be delightful with the sleighing and the skating and the tobogganing. There may be snow-shoeing, too, she says."

"Lovely!" echoed Caroline, her eyes on the ceiling and her lips curving a faint smile.

"Oh, poor dear," cried Barbara, "I forgot. There won't be much skating and snow-shoeing for you, I'm afraid, with that miserable ankle. But, never mind, dearie, 'twill be lots better, then, and you can go sleigh-riding, anyway."

"Oh, no I can't," replied Caroline, shaking her head. "I'm not invited, you see."

"Not in—vited!" gasped Barbara.

Caroline laughed at the dismayed face.

"No, ma'am," she said demurely.

"But what is your note?" faltered Barbara.

Caroline waved her two hands.

"It says," she began, "that Mrs. Carew exceedingly regrets my not being able to accompany my cousin to The Oaks, but she hopes very much that my cousin will be willing to go without me."

"But you could go by Friday!"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Then you shall."

"Tut, tut—I'm not invited."

"But you would have been if she had known."

"Not a bit of it!"

"You mean——"

Caroline nodded in answer to the dawning con-

sternation in the eyes opposite. Her own were sparkling with merriment.

"Then—I—won't—go," asserted Barbara.

"Oh, yes you will, dear."

"No. I've decided once for all, Caroline. You must take your rightful position. I refuse to masquerade in this absurd fashion any longer. It's a good chance now to end it. Here's this note to Caroline; well, you're Caroline—now answer it."

"Just as if I would!" laughed Caroline, gleefully. "Not a bit of it! When that grand announcement is made, I want to be upright on my own two feet, ready to see all the fun and to take all the consequences. No, ma'am; I'm not going to skulk back here and write a note!"

"But, Caroline——"

"Now, see here, dearie," interrupted Caroline, affectionately. "I'll warrant that at this moment Mrs. Jack Carew is writing notes, giving orders, and putting all available household machinery into motion,"—exactly what Mrs. Carew was doing—"so that this week-end visit to The Oaks may not seem like the sudden idea which it really is. Why, my dear, you'll have a perfectly lovely time. Now go and answer your note!"

CHAPTER V

IT was decidedly disappointing to Paul Carew that his little brown-eyed friend was not a member of his mother's house-party. More than that, he suspected that the sprained ankle had been Mrs. Carew's incentive for hurrying up the affair at this short notice, so that she might seize the golden opportunity for throwing her beloved son and the young woman of her choice together with no brown-eyed maid to lure him away.

"So that's the game!" thought Carew, thoroughly angry. "Humph, we'll see!"

By ten o'clock Saturday morning all of Mrs. Carew's guests were playing like happy children out of doors. It was then that Paul Carew made the first move in the course of action which he had determined upon as being the best means to cope with and to defeat his mother's too plainly laid plans.

In so far as his ideas of politeness would allow, he left Miss Sanderson severely alone, but he developed a wonderful geniality toward all the others. He skated—but not with the tall blonde; he snow-balled—but not with this same blonde; he coasted—but not with Miss Sanderson, and he snow-shoed—but again not with Miss Sanderson. He laughed and chatted and joked and told stories; but not one of his jokes made a direct appeal to this young woman, and not one of his stories was told apparently for her ears.

And yet——

When night came Paul Carew knew that Miss Sanderson had skated the most gracefully, snow-balled the most accurately, and snow-shoed the least awkwardly of any lady of the party; he also knew which of his jokes had brought the swift retort to Miss Sanderson's lips, and which of his stories had brought the quick flash to Miss Sanderson's eyes; furthermore, he also was sure that no suit was more natty, no rose-flush more becoming, no foot more trim than was this same Miss Sanderson's.

There was a heavy snow-fall Sunday which kept the guests indoors. To Carew it was a long day of restless wandering from room to room, of perfunctory smokes with tiresome men, and of punctilious talks with unbrilliant women, pervaded constantly by a furtive watching of a certain fair-haired, slender young woman who was always doing the only interesting thing in the room, or making the only original remark that was heard.

Monday dawned fair and clear. There was to be a sleigh-ride to a neighboring town with a country-hotel dinner at the end of it. The sleighs—some double, some single, but all cozy with robes and comfortable with foot-warmers—drew up one by one before the door as Mrs. Carew marshalled her guests. To her son and Miss Sanderson she assigned one of the single sleighs.

Barbara looked frankly pleased as Carew helped her to her seat, but the light died from her eyes when she saw the stern-set lines of the man's face. She did not know that every frowning lineament had been hastily summoned to hide the joy which Carew suddenly found in his heart.

"So it's come to this," he was thinking bitterly, as he jerked the robe into place; "I'm pleased,

pleased, like all the rest to bow down and worship at this golden shrine!"

The first mile was a silent one; but gradually the witchery of the sun-lit morning, of the tinkling bells, and of the exhilarating air, together with the subtle charm of the radiant girl so near him, roused Carew from his morbid fancies. Always at his best out of doors, with the sweep of the wind on his cheek and with the feel of the reins in his hand, and conscious now of no prying, calculating eye, he gave himself unreservedly to the enjoyment of the moment at hand.

The change electrified Barbara. She had not supposed he could talk so well, and she found herself taxed indeed to respond to his sallies.

Perhaps it was his interest in the conversation that caused Carew to be at times almost unmindful of his horse. It was at one of these times that the animal shied violently, and bolted down the long straight road.

Barbara sat tense and silent while the man beside her threw all of his strength into his iron-grip on the reins. Trees and shrubs flew past like baffled spirits of evil. The sharp air stung the cheeks of both man and girl, and whistled by their ears like the lash of some monster whip. Far ahead the road divided with an abrupt turn to the right and another to the left. Carew knew the place well and, just before he reached it, braced himself for one last effort. A mighty pull—and the left rein snapped. The sleigh swerved sharply and turned on its side, plunging the man and the girl into the snow.

Barbara was thrown clear of the sleigh, but Carew was dragged a few feet until his common sense and the knowledge that his companion was in the snow

behind him caused him to relinquish his hold. With a twist of his body he rolled to one side and lay there motionless while the overturned sleigh ploughed into the snow not a foot from his head. The next minute he sat up and watched the end of the struggle.

Ten yards ahead the battered sleigh crashed against a guidepost; the few remaining bits of leather snapped, and the horse ran free down the hill. Carew turned to find Barbara standing beside him.

"And you're not hurt?" he cried, getting stiffly to his feet.

"Not a bit. And you?—oh, you are!" she exclaimed, as he turned his head.

Carew stripped off his right glove and put his hand to his cheek.

"Bah! It's only a scratch," he growled, frowning at the crimson stains that capped his finger-tips. "Now don't fret. It's all right. I'll fix it," he went on hurriedly, giving her an apprehensive glance, and diving into his pockets with both hands.

Barbara did not reply. In a moment her gloves were off, and her hands were searching among the scattered robes for her muff. In another moment she was back at his side shaking out the folds of a bit of snowy linen.

"Now wait just a minute, please; I'll have it all right. It doesn't bleed much—it isn't deep, I fancy," she finished, after a swift, but keen look at his face.

Carew watched in dumb amazement the girl's prompt, yet unhurried movements, as she dropped the handkerchief upon a convenient robe, stepped to one side and rubbed her hands vigorously with clean, untrodden snow. When she came back there

was another bit of snow melting in the palm of her left hand.

"I'll bathe it and see how much there is to it," she explained, as she dipped her handkerchief into her improvised basin. "There, it's quite stopped bleeding," she added a little later. "Apparently the skin was just grazed."

Carew was still silent. The red blood in his veins was throbbing an ecstatic response to each touch of the soft fingers, each zephyr of light breath from the parted lips so near him; yet every throb brought with it a fierce, unreasoning antagonism against this "gilded young woman's officiousness," as he was pleased to term it. He was vexed at Barbara's deftness, and annoyed at her coolness during the past ten minutes. It would have pleased him better had she been nervous and helpless, shrieking at the first sight of blood on his face, thus more nearly meeting his cherished idea of how a pampered young woman of wealth and fashion should conduct herself under like circumstances. By the time Barbara had finished, the man had worked himself into a state of irritable sarcasm highly satisfactory to his pride.

"Thank you," said he constrainedly. "I'm waiting."

"Waiting?"

"For the hysterics—you've delayed them admirably."

Barbara smiled.

"And why must I have hysterics, pray?" she demanded.

"Never mind," he replied, with a short laugh. "Suppose we see what can be done to make you comfortable while we wait; time enough for questions later on. There isn't a house within two miles, but

some of the rest of the party must surely be along soon, and there's nothing to do but wait until they come and pick us up. We'll fix a seat for you in the sleigh."

And he gathered up the robes and started for the guidepost.

Some minutes' hard work placed the sleigh upright and arranged a fairly comfortable nest for Barbara; then Carew silently took his place at her side.

For a time neither spoke; Carew could not—he thought—and Barbara would not. It did not please Carew to be thus conquered by a horse, and apparently, to be in a fair way conquered by a girl, as well—and the one girl, too, that he most wished to ignore.

Barbara stole a covert glance at the silent figure beside her. The eyes, somber and unwinking, gazed straight ahead. The lips, guiltless of curves, were set into stern, unsmiling lines. A sudden overwhelming sense of the absurdity of the affair came to Barbara and she broke the silence with a ringing laugh.

"You seem amused," vouchsafed the man, without turning his head.

"I am," confessed Barbara. "Only think how we shall look to our friends when they catch their first glimpse of us sitting here in this idiotic fashion with a guidepost for a horse!"

And Barbara's words ended in another joyous peal of laughter.

Much against his will, Carew's lips relaxed.

"I can imagine it," he said grimly.

There was another long silence, then Barbara sighed.

"Are you cold?" demanded Carew.

"Warm as toast."

"That's fortunate," he returned, and lapsed into his old silence.

Barbara eyed him furtively; then she sighed again.

The man did not move.

"Er—Mr. Carew," began Barbara demurely, "I am lonesome."

"What?" cried the man, startled out of his moroseness; then he caught a glimpse of her face. "I regret, indeed, to deprive you so long of your usual throng of admirers." His voice shook a little.

"Oh, I don't mind that in the least," retorted Barbara, airily. "You'll do just as well—only you must be nice and entertaining."

"Indeed!" murmured Carew, with a light lifting of his heavy brows. "You set too hard a task, I fear. I can't be expected to compete with multitudes. Just think how many pretty things ten men can say to you while I am getting off one!"

"Oh, but you don't have to say pretty things to be nice and entertaining," returned Barbara. "You are much more amusing when you are natural, you know—just stern and cross, and maybe a little bit rude."

"Well, upon my word!" ejaculated Carew. "Am I quite—that?"

"Quite."

"Indeed! I beg your pardon, I'm sure," he began stiffly.

Barbara cut him short.

"Oh, don't—please don't! You'll spoil it all. Don't you see? You'll be like the others."

"Then I am—different?"

She nodded emphatically.

"How?" he demanded.

"I've told you."

"Is that all the way?"

The stern lines had vanished from Carew's face. There was a new light in the man's eye. Barbara saw, and grew restless under his catechism.

"Isn't that sufficient?" she parried.

"To whet my curiosity—yes."

She was silent.

He raised his head and drew a long breath.

"I think I can tell you myself," he went on gravely. "I don't carry your muff nor dangle your boa; I don't stoop to the nod of your head nor run at the beck of your fingers."

"Mr. Carew, why are those men so silly?" cut in Barbara.

"Does their devotion weary you?"

"Decidedly."

Carew flashed a swift glance into Barbara's eyes—a glance so merry, so whimsical, so altogether tantalizing that Barbara responded as if it had been a spoken word.

"Well?" she cried eagerly.

"This is a most exceptional conversation, Miss Sanderson," said Carew, tentatively.

"Go on!" encouraged Barbara.

Still he hesitated.

"Well?" she prompted.

"I was only thinking—there is a way out of it—in my opinion."

"And that is——?"

"Hand over your millions to your cousin—change places with her."

Barbara almost sprang from her seat.

"Oh!" she cried, while the red surged to her forehead.

Then the full force of the suggestion came to her, and she turned merry eyes on her companion.

"You are complimentary," she laughed. "I'm glad, sir, to find just how high an estimate you place on my attractions—of themselves."

"Oh, but——"

"Well, of all things, what are you doing here?" demanded an amazed voice, as a two-seated sleigh swung around the curve.

"Waiting for you," returned Carew, nonchalantly, as he helped Barbara to the ground. "And why are you so late, pray?"

"Late! My dear boy, you don't think we've just come from the house! Why, we've been 'way to the hotel, and not finding sign or symptom of you we hustled ourselves off to look for you."

"But you didn't pass here on your way down!" exclaimed Carew.

"We didn't; we took the short cut a mile up the road."

"Short cut," muttered Carew, "who'd want a short cut a day like this!"

And for some reason the rose-flush deepened in Barbara's cheek.

CHAPTER VI

ON Tuesday, Mrs. Carew, together with her son and guests left The Oaks and returned to Hampdon. The house-party was pronounced an unqualified success by the guests—and by Mrs. Carew as well, under her breath. Mrs. Carew was building air-castles, though for their foundation there was only the rose-flush in a girl's cheek, and the new light in a man's eyes.

It certainly was not easy for Carew to go back to the old indifferent footing with Miss Sanderson after that memorable sleigh-ride. At first he tried to avoid her as before; but one merry glance from her eyes brought an answering gleam of comprehension from his own, and invariably led him by a circuitous, but none the less sure, route to her side. Once there, an enigmatical remark, to which he alone possessed the key, or a low-voiced comment, whose words were for only his ears, held him a willing captive.

Society was amazed, but it secretly chuckled at the change. Even the men who feared his rivalry could not keep from rejoicing that they now might rank him as one of themselves—it gave countenance to their race for this golden prize.

Caroline, too, saw the change, and smiled. She was well pleased. It was then, too, that Mrs. Carew's air-castles took upon themselves turrets and towers of certainty. Still fearful, however, lest they were built upon the sands of possibility, instead of upon

the rocks of probability, Mrs. Carew hid her joy from her son's eyes, and accepted with studied indifference this new turn of affairs which seemed to promise so much.

It was this very diplomacy on his mother's part, perhaps, that closed Paul Carew's eyes. So naturally had it all taken place, so easily did his feet slip into the path prepared for them, and so gradually had the change come about—Carew scarcely realized that it was a change at all.

As for Barbara herself, she stopped less and less frequently to think now. She accepted what came with a reckless delight that yet bore with it a fear to question. She only knew that the sun never had been brighter, the sky bluer, nor the air more exhilarating than on those early days in January.

The month was not two weeks old, however, when there came the reaction, and Barbara's restlessness found voice.

"Caroline," she remonstrated one day, "I'm seriously disturbed. Haven't you had enough of this absurd farce of masquerading?"

"Why, I'm enjoying it," murmured Caroline.

"I am not."

"But, only think of the admiring throngs——"

A gesture from Barbara silenced her.

"Caroline, that's exactly the trouble. Don't you see? They are getting troublesome—these admiring throngs!" Barbara voice quivered with scorn.

"Poor dear!" soothed Caroline.

Barbara sprang to her feet and moved restlessly around the room.

"Caroline," she began, turning and confronting her cousin, "it's just got to stop. If you don't find a way to tell, I shall. I never—never thought the

thing would last like this. If I'd had the faintest conception of your carrying it to such a length, I would have vetoed it at the start."

"But, dearie," coaxed Caroline, "I didn't suppose it would last so long either. I had no idea it would be for more than a week or two. I thought, of course, 'twould have been found out long ago; but it hasn't—and it has been fun!"

"'Fun!'"

"Dear, it's only a joke. Don't make it so serious."

"Serious!" stormed Barbara. "I suppose it isn't serious that Mr. Houston, and Mr. Livingstone, and half a dozen others are sending me flowers and candy every fifteen minutes. I tell you, Caroline, I don't dare to be alone a second with any one of those men for fear of a proposal of marriage!"

"And there's Carew, too," murmured Caroline.

Barbara flushed scarlet.

"You are entirely mistaken there; Mr. Carew is emphatically not one of them."

"Oh!" said Caroline.

Barbara turned to her cousin indignantly.

"Caroline," she said sharply, "I'll give you just twenty-four hours. At the end of that time, if things and people are not in their proper places once more, I shall go straight home. You can explain the disappearance of the 'rich Miss Sanderson' then in any way you please."

"Yes, ma'am," murmured Caroline, with pretended meekness; but in her heart she knew herself conquered.

Before the twenty-four hours were half gone, however, a certain yellow envelope had put a new phase on the situation. It contained a telegram from the husband of Caroline's old nurse—the nurse who had

almost worshipped Caroline from her babyhood days. The telegram read:

Sarah is dying. She calls for you. Could you come?

There was not a moment's hesitation on Caroline's part. She made preparations at once to leave on the first train for Vermont. To Barbara she said softly in farewell:

"My dear, I give you my word of honor, I'll make everything right immediately upon my return. Be patient a wee bit longer—there's a dear!"

In her room that night, Barbara thought of those words.

"Patient!" she laughed scornfully. "As if I could be anything else! I certainly wouldn't be apt to take the brunt of this thing all alone."

CHAPTER VII

THE days that immediately followed were miserable ones for Barbara. The increasing devotion of Houston, Livingstone, and the others convinced her that no idle fears had led her to appeal to her cousin. Caroline had been detained in Vermont longer than she expected to be. The sick woman had rallied a little, and she begged so piteously for Caroline to stay until the end—which could not be far off, the doctor said—that Caroline had written that she shouldn't return home so long as she could be of any comfort where she was.

It was on the fourth day after Caroline's departure that Barbara, almost in despair at the seemingly rapid culmination of her fears, determined to summon Carew to her aid. There had been a few guests to dinner, and Carew had lingered after the rest had gone. Mrs. Chetwood was nodding over the evening paper when Barbara led the way to the far end of the drawing-room where their words would not reach her aunt's ears. Carew watched her in wonder, and with a curious quickening of his pulse as she motioned him to a seat at her side.

"Mr. Carew," she began, with manifest embarrassment, "I want your help."

"Yes." His voice was low, but eager.

The red grew deeper in Barbara's cheek. After all, it was harder than she had thought it would be. It was a bit unusual to ask a man to be so devoted that half a dozen others could get no chance to pour their unwelcome love into her ears.

"It—it is not easy for me to tell it," she faltered. "It—it is so absurd—so—I'm afraid you won't understand it."

"Try to tell me, please," begged the man, softly, leaning forward so that his eyes might look into hers. "I'm sure I will understand."

Barbara raised her head and met his level gaze. The next moment her eyelashes swept her cheek, and her hands fluttered nervously to her throat.

"I—on second thoughts, I believe I won't do it," she said hurriedly. "I'm sure you couldn't help me. I'll fight it out alone."

"My dear girl, surely you think I'm your friend!"

"Yes."

"And shouldn't friends help—other friends?"

"Perhaps."

"Then tell me what troubles you."

"You—might not be able to help me."

"Is it kind not to give me the opportunity?"

Barbara hesitated.

"I—I believe I will tell you," she cried suddenly.

"Of course you will!" exclaimed the man. "I'm listening."

Barbara fixed her eyes on the glowing brass knob of one of the andirons ten feet away. Her words tumbled over one another in confused haste, but there was not one that failed to reach the quick ear of the man at her side.

"It—it is this way. I want you to do something for me. Perhaps you remember—you told me once that—that you never held my muff nor carried my boa; nor obeyed the nod of my head or the beckoning of my fingers. Well, I want you to—do all those things for just a few days. Will you?"

It was then that Barbara turned and raised luminous eyes to his.

Carew searched for words, but could find none; even his voice played the coward and ran away. He could only gaze dumbly into the shy, flushed face, while a torrent of confused thoughts flooded his brain. His amazement was not lessened when the girl made a swift little gesture of delight.

"Oh, I'm so glad you take it like that," she sighed, in plain relief. "I was so afraid you'd be sarcastically polite and say 'With pleasure, my dear Miss Sanderson'; but, instead, you are frankly amazed, and you pay me the compliment of letting me see it, too. The rest will be easy, now," she went on happily. "Listen, please; if you are with me there will be no chance for those silly boys to say what is so evidently on the tip of their tongue."

"And you don't want them to say it?" Carew's voice gave no indication of his inward tumult.

"I do not."

"Poor boys!"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Your sympathy is quite wasted, I assure you," she retorted. Then, with a quick change of manner: "I may depend on your help?"

"Most certainly! It will be a pleasure——" a swift glance of reproach stayed his lips. "I mean, I shall be glad to serve you," he corrected, with a smile.

"Thank you: it will be only for a few days," she explained, the old hesitancy coming back to her manner. "You see I—I am in a false position just now."

"And am I not to know about that, too?" His eyes were pleading.

She shook her head.

"The secret of it is not entirely mine to give," she replied. "But—when you do know it you will understand it—I am sure you will; and yet—now that I have told you, I am almost frightened. When you are gone, I shall wish that I hadn't, I fear. I shall not know just what you'll be thinking. I shall be afraid you'll misunderstand for—for even these few days. It was an extraordinary request, after all, and——" She dropped her hands, loosely clasped, to her lap, and raised troubled eyes to his face; "Please, won't you—say something?" she cried with a nervous little laugh.

The man's breath quickened. For long minutes now he had been fighting an overmastering something that had set the blood to coursing through his veins with tingling ecstasy, and that had almost found speech at his eyes if not at his lips. He dropped his hand heavily on her clasped fingers and challenged her gaze to meet his.

"Caroline, I have something to say," he began, his voice shaking; but at the name the girl sprang to her feet with a cry so agonized that he stopped in dismay.

"No, no—not that—not that!" she exclaimed. "Not you—now!"

For an instant he hesitated, and his mutinous eyes sought hers with ardent appeal; then he took both her hands in his with almost reverent gentleness, and bowed his head until his lips touched her fingers.

"As you will," he said huskily. Turning, he passed swiftly down the long room and into the hall. A moment later Barbara heard the outer door close.

Outside, the street echoed and re-echoed the sharp

click of a man's steps as a solitary pedestrian hurried down the avenue.

"So it's come to this," Carew was thinking bitterly; "this—I, too, have fallen down at this golden shrine; and she—good Heaven! she thinks I am like the rest. She trusted me. She asked my aid; she appealed to me—to me alone. And I?—how did I meet the trust? By thrusting in her face the very thing she so dreaded. How troubled her dear eyes were, when they met mine! How tremulous her lips, her hands! How I longed to catch and hold those fluttering little fingers! By Heaven! I will prove to her that she can trust me."

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. JACK CAREW gave a dinner-party the next evening; and a few minutes before the hour appointed, a tall, bronze-bearded young man was ushered into the Carew drawing-room.

"This is a pleasure, Mr. Bartlett," cried Mrs. Carew, extending a cordial hand.

"To me, certainly," drawled a slow voice, which somehow gave the impression of hidden depth and strength.

Mrs. Carew smiled.

"I was delighted when I heard of your arrival," she said, "and I'm so glad you could come to-night. You'll meet the old crowd here, too—Houston, Miss Lawrence, and—oh, and I have a surprise for you; that Miss Sanderson you met in Paris and raved over—she's to be here."

"The Miss Sanderson?" cried Dick joyfully.

Mrs. Carew nodded, then turned to greet other guests.

"Yes, it's the Miss Sanderson," she resumed as soon as she got Bartlett's ear again. "She has lots of money, you know, and every one has fallen an abject slave to her blue-eyed, golden-haired majesty."

"'Blue eyed'—'golden haired!'" exclaimed Bartlett in a tone that suddenly silenced the hum of voices near them. Paul Carew stepped close to his mother's side, his eyes on Bartlett's face.

"My dear lady," continued Bartlett, with a short laugh, "your charmer is not mine, I assure you."

"But she did know you in Paris, Dick," expostulated Mrs. Carew, dazedly. "I talked with her about you. Pray, are there two Caroline Sanders?"

"Only one, I solemnly swear," bowed Dick, mockingly. "There could be but one with those glorious brown eyes."

"Brown eyes!" gasped Mrs. Carew, but the low voice of her son interrupted.

"Mother—mother—she's here!"

For a fleeting moment Mrs. Carew and her guests caught the full beauty of the tall figure against the crimson draperies of the doorway. There were the graceful folds of shimmering white outlining the slender form and sweeping the floor at its feet; there was a dash of exquisite blue where fine turquoises encircled the throat and bordered the low cut corsage; above, there was the well set, proudly carried head with its crown of golden hair and its simple knot of turquoise velvet.

"I never set eyes on that girl before," said Dick Bartlett in a low, distinct voice; and in the electric-silence that followed his words, Barbara swept gracefully down the room to greet her hostess.

Mrs. Carew's voice trembled over the few words of greeting; it trembled still more as she said:

"Miss Sanderson, you have met Mr. Bartlett, I believe."

Barbara bowed gravely. The name scarcely reached her ears, so conscious was she of that other presence at Mrs. Carew's side. She was dreading, yet longing to meet Paul Carew's eyes.

To Dick Bartlett it was a moment of mute stupefaction. He had looked for a polite denial of the acquaintance: he had received a cool bow of recog-

nition. The only thing that finally came clear to his bewildered senses was that that was a case for a detective, not a newspaper correspondent. Who was this yellow haired siren that was palming herself off as his winsome little brown-eyed friend? Where was the real Caroline Sanderson? A fierce, uncontrollable anger took possession of him. He forgot the time and the place, his hostess, and what was due to her guests; he knew only an overmastering desire to bring complete discomfiture on this sham of a woman before him. He stepped close to the girl's side, and spoke. His voice was low, but so breathless was the silence about him that every word was distinct to all ears.

"I find you somewhat changed, Miss Sanderson. You are taller than when I saw you in Paris. Your hair, too—brown, then; was it not?"

Every trace of color left Barbara's face. She swayed dizzily. It was an almost unconscious movement on Paul Carew's part that brought him close to her side just as her trembling lips murmured:

"Mr.—Bartlett!"

"Yes," bowed the newspaper correspondent.

CHAPTER IX

THERE had been a sudden change for the worse in the condition of the sick nurse in Vermont, and she had passed away during the night preceding Mrs. Carew's dinner-party. Caroline had made immediate plans for a return home, but the best connections she could make with the somewhat irregular train accommodations would not bring her into Hampdon until half-past four o'clock. As it happened, the trains were late, and it was just six when she reached home and burst unceremoniously into Mrs. Chetwood's presence.

"Aunt Emily, tell me, isn't this Mrs. Carew's dinner-party night?" she cried, after a hurried kiss of greeting.

"Why, yes, dear. You were invited, you know, but——"

"Was seven the hour?" interrupted Caroline, recklessly.

"Yes, dear."

The girl glanced hastily at the little bronze clock on the mantle.

"Six! Then Barbara hasn't gone," she cried in a relieved voice.

"Oh, but she has," returned Mrs. Chetwood. "She was going to drive around by Mrs. Wheeler's and leave some roses for Adelaide; she was to stay and chat with her until time to go to Mrs. Carew's. I tried not to have her, but she would do it. She has been restless and uneasy all day."

Caroline gave a sudden exclamation and sank into

the nearest chair. Two minutes later she was again on her feet.

"Aunt Emily, I'm going to dress right away, and drive straight to Mrs. Carew's."

"But you refused—your place will be filled!" cried Mrs. Chetwood in dismay.

"Dinner! I never thought of dinner. I sha'n't stay, of course, but I must get there before Barbara does. Auntie, Dick Bartlett is in town. I read it in the newspaper just before I got to Hampdon, and he'll be sure to be at that dinner-party; Mrs. Carew dotes on him—always did. He knew me in Paris, you know. Only think what it means if he sees Barbara first! Oh!"

And Caroline ran from the room and hurried upstairs.

Caroline Sanderson made all possible haste with her toilet that night, yet, hurry as best she could, she did not reach Mrs. Carew's drawing-room door until just as Dick Bartlett bowed his response to Barbara's aghast exclamation.

A dismayed glance at the little group around Barbara told Caroline that her coming was all but too late. With a desperate attempt, however, to grasp and hold what was left of the situation, she tripped through the door and advanced upon the group with a merry laugh.

"Oh, Mr. Bartlett," she cried, "why didn't you tell me you were coming to-night, then I wouldn't have lost half of the fun!"

A tense something snapped in the consciousness of every member of the group; the laugh cleared the atmosphere, and Dick Bartlett's enthusiastic welcoming of Caroline filled every one's thoughts for a moment. Then came a dazed pause.

"And are you Caroline Sanderson?" demanded a dozen voices at once.

Caroline nodded gleefully.

"At your service," she said, ending with a low bow.

"And you?" Every eye was turned on Barbara.

"I am Barbara," said that young lady, too dumb-founded at Caroline's sudden appearance to say more.

Society, as represented by Mrs. Carew's dinner-party, drew one long breath of amazement.

"But how——

"What——

"I don't see——

"But did you——" began half a dozen voices at once.

Caroline had expected this attack, and she was ready for it.

"Very simply!" she laughed. "Through a little slip at the first our names were confused, and I couldn't resist the temptation to let it pass."

There was a chorus of exclamations; then every one laughed and talked together.

"We'll just never forgive you!" cried one after another, merrily; and Barbara's blue eyes flashed a mirthful glance of comprehension into the brown, as Barbara found the positions reversed and herself on the outer edge of the group of which Caroline was the radiant center.

Few of Mrs. Carew's dinners were very formal affairs, and this certainly was not one of the few. Caroline's objections to staying were soon overruled and she was prevailed upon to make one of the merry company gathered around the table a little later. By her side sat Paul Carew, in accordance

with his mother's request. Mrs. Carew had told him that this attention would make Caroline's position easier under the very peculiar circumstances in which she was placed. Opposite, sat Barbara, quiet, and a little flushed, but with no trace in her eyes of the troubled look which for so many days had disturbed Carew. It was in vain, however, that he challenged those same eyes to meet his. Barbara would not so much as glance at him.

"And so this was the secret," thought Carew; "and that was why she would not let me speak. And now there's no golden stumbling-block in my way. She's poor—God bless her!" And Carew's lips curved into an exultant smile.

Even after the coffee and cigars, there was no chance for *tête-à-têtes*; and in spite of Carew's best efforts, there were only a warm clasp of Barbara's fingers and a conventional word or two before Barbara left with her cousin.

"To-morrow I'll see her," promised Carew to himself; "to-morrow!"

And he bowed low to the last of his mother's guests.

CHAPTER X

DEAR me, Paul, am I awake, or am I dreaming?" demanded Mrs. Carew, sinking into a big leather chair before the library fireplace, as the hall-door closed. "Is that little brown-eyed maid really Caroline Sanderson? Is she?"

"It looks like it, mother."

There was a silence. Paul was gazing dreamily into the fire. His mother eyed him with some apprehension. When she finally spoke her voice was a bit forced.

"It was quite a joke on us, wasn't it? Really, Paul, I—I think you were the only one of the whole lot of us who saw the real Caroline's true worth. You liked her from the first, you know."

"I did, most certainly," smiled Carew.

"You like her the best, now, too, don't you?" Mrs. Carew tried to make her voice unconcerned.

A stern look leaped into the young man's eyes, but almost at once it gave way to a whimsical twinkle—Carew could afford to be whimsical. To him the road stretched straight ahead in a rosy glow of happiness.

"I don't think I do now, mother," he returned smoothly. "You know, you made it easy for me to see a good deal of the other Miss Sanderson, and—I could not fail to see her worth."

"Paul, you don't—love her?"

All the merriment left Carew's face. He met his mother's gaze squarely, his eyes glowing.

"I do, mother," he said quietly.

For a moment Mrs. Carew's eyes dwelt on her son's face with mingled tenderness and longing; then she sighed and put her hand to her head.

"It's all right, Paul—all right. I love her myself. I don't blame you. I did want the money for you, but——" she broke off short and started to her feet. "Paul—Paul—my poor boy!" she cried.

"Why, mother!" The man gazed in astonishment at the woman's transformed face. "What is it?"

"Paul, you—can't, dear. She's Barbara, and Barbara's engaged!"

"En—gaged!"

"She is—she is—it's a secret, but I had to tell you. Molly Martingale wrote it. I'll get the letter—it's here."

And Mrs. Carew hurried to the writing-desk in the corner.

Once more Helen Carew read that letter straight through from the first word to the last—this time aloud—and once more the "possibilities" and the "engagement" referred to Barbara instead of to Caroline. Mrs. Carew's voice choked and broke over the last words, and her eyes lifted themselves fearfully to her son's face. In spite of what she knew she must see there, she started at the misery-filled eyes and tense lips.

"May it not be—somehow, a—mistake?" he asked.

Mrs. Carew shook her head.

"Read for yourself," she said sadly, handing him the letter.

The man, too, read straight through without a thought of skipping.

"I—I understand," he said huskily, holding out with a shaking hand the bit of pale blue note-paper.

Then he rose somewhat unsteadily to his feet. "Good-night, mother."

"Paul, I'm sure," began Mrs. Carew, pleadingly, but a gesture from her son's hand silenced her.

"Not now, please, mother—to-morrow!" And he was gone.

"Oh-oh-oh!" sobbed Mrs. Carew, sinking back into her chair. "And I can't help him—I can't help him!"

Upstairs at his desk sat her son, his head bowed on his outstretched arms.

"So that was the secret, and that was the false position!" he moaned over and over again. "It never was the other at all. And she wanted to save me from myself, and she would not even listen. And yet—how dear she's grown to me—how dear!"

CHAPTER XI

IT was half past seven the next morning when Mrs. Carew was gently awakened by her maid.

"I beg pardon, Mrs. Carew—your son—he wishes to speak to you, and bade me wake you up."

Some minutes later Mrs. Carew entered her private sitting-room and confronted a grave-faced man.

"Paul!"

"Forgive me, mother; I had to see you. I'm off to New York, and shall sail for London to-morrow."

"London!" Mrs. Carew dropped weakly into a chair.

"I've got to go, mother. It's the best way out of it. I've thought of it on all sides. I've got to fight it out by myself, and I've got to do it away from—her. Weeks ago Uncle Charles asked me to go to London and attend to that Hendricks affair for him. As I happen to know he had engaged passage for to-morrow. I shall go in his place, that's all; and he'll be mighty glad of the chance to stay at home."

"But, Paul—Miss Sanderson! What will she—think?"

The man turned his head so that only his clean cut profile with its firm mouth and chin met the anxious eyes of his mother.

"She will probably give my departure scarcely a thought," he returned with an effort. "I did hope—but never mind," he broke off bitterly. "I see my mistake now. I shall write a conventional note of

good-by, of course, and there the matter will end, save that I shall go off and stay off until I can come back and face her like a man. Knowing what I do now, I can understand something she half told me the other night. If she thinks of me at all, she will think I am merely following her wishes by holding my peace. And now—good-by, mother.”

It was some time later that Caroline and Barbara Sanderson, together with Mrs. Chetwood, rose from their breakfast-table. The meal had been enlivened by a full account of Mrs. Carew’s dinner-party the evening before. Mrs. Chetwood had been in a flutter of excitement ever since Caroline’s whirlwind arrival at seven o’clock, and she fell upon each bit of information with eager delight.

“Well, well, bless my soul,” she nodded vigorously, as they passed out of the breakfast-room. “It must have been almost as good as a play. How I should like to see Paul Carew now!”

“Well, you won’t have to wait long, aunt, I fancy,” laughed Caroline, as Mrs. Chetwood turned to go up the stairs. “He assured me he should call to-day.”

A swift red showed in Barbara’s cheek.

“Oh, he did,” repeated Caroline, her eyes on Barbara’s face.

“I haven’t a doubt of it,” retorted Barbara, flip-pantly, as they entered the library together. “He will have to call and pay his respects to the new millionairess, of course.”

“Now that’s just where the new millionairess won’t cut any figure,” replied Caroline, saucily. “It’s the deposed millionairess that will get all the ‘respects.’”

“Humph!” shrugged Barbara, all the more dis-

dainfully because of the sudden joy that would sing in her heart. "You think him so different, then, from the rest?"

"Emphatically, yes."

Barbara's eyes sought the window.

"Oh!" she said. "And yet, he's seemed to worship—gold like the others of late."

"In the hair only," amended Caroline, softly.

"Now wouldn't it be funny," resumed Barbara, as if she had not heard, "if he should—well, follow in Houston's and Livingstone's footsteps and refuse to meet my eyes. Caroline, did you see them last night?"

"I most certainly did!" laughed Caroline. "No, my dear, the whole world couldn't keep Paul Carew away from a certain young woman of my acquaintance just now, I'm thinking. He——"

She stopped as a maid entered with a note.

At first sight of the handwriting, Barbara flushed. Caroline leaned back in her chair and watched the pretty color grow in her cousin's cheek as the letter was opened; then she started forward in amazement at the sudden white that came to Barbara's face.

"Barbara!" she cried. "Why, Barbara!"

Mechanically Barbara held out the letter.

"Mr. Carew has—written," she said.

MY DEAR MISS SANDERSON:

Sudden business calls me abroad for some weeks. It is imperative that I leave to-day, therefore I do not find it possible to call and tender you and your cousin my congratulations on the merry outcome of your little masquerade.

With the best of wishes for you both, and hoping to renew our acquaintance at some future date, I am,

Very sincerely yours,

PAUL CAREW.

"Barbara, what did you do to him?" demanded Caroline, after a benumbed silence.

"Let him see who I was, to be sure," returned Barbara, in a voice that shook in spite of her efforts to control it.

"That's not it—I never will believe it!"

"No?" replied Barbara. Her lips smiled, but her eyes were dark with anger and hurt pride. "Then perhaps it really is—business."

"'Business!'" scoffed Caroline. "Barbara, you know better. Haven't I eyes? Haven't I seen him watch you, and be drawn as by a magnet straight to your side?"

"While I was 'the rich Miss Sanderson'—yes," said Barbara, still with that mocking smile.

"Barbara, you did do something—say something," began Caroline; but the girl opposite turned on her so fiercely she stopped, her remonstrance half given.

"I'll tell you what I did," stormed Barbara. "I kept him from laying his hand and his name at the feet of the rich Miss Sanderson; I saved him from himself; I told him that I was in a false position—that I had a secret which was not mine to give. Last night, when you declared your true name, he learned what that false position was; last night he discovered the secret. This morning he is gone—gone! And he didn't dare to face me; he didn't dare to meet my eyes. He hid, like the coward that he is, behind that pitiful pen-scrawl and the plea of 'business!' Now do you believe what I say?"

For a breathless instant Caroline sat motionless, gazing at the quivering, wrathful-eyed girl before her; then she held out two loving arms.

"He just isn't worth one thought, dearie, and we won't give him one, either. I was sure I never

could believe it, but it looks as if I should have to, after all. I—I think I hate that man, Barbara!”

It was not one thought, but many thoughts of Carew, however, that forced a way into Barbara's heart during the days that followed, even though Barbara's angry pride stood at the door with a flaming sword of scorn and tried to drive them back—they still trooped in, until the many became as one, so continuously was the big, strong man in her consciousness, and always with the tender, happy light in his eyes as she had last seen him.

CHAPTER XII

PAUL CAREW had crossed the Atlantic many times, but never before was his trip in reality so short and in seeming so long. Once on land, he plunged into business with an avidity and an attention to detail that brought his mission to a completion in a wonderfully short time—to Carew, it was a disastrously short time. He certainly was not ready to go back to America now. If his ostensible reason for leaving Hampdon no longer called for his absence, his real reason most surely did. As yet he had not found the courage that would enable him to meet unflinchingly a certain all-too-well remembered pair of blue eyes.

He sat down and wrote to his uncle a lengthly account of the business so recently brought to a satisfactory close. This letter, together with one to his mother stating that other matters would keep him some months longer abroad, he despatched at once. Then he drew a long breath of relief.

From London he drifted to Paris, from Paris to Monte Carlo, and from Monte Carlo back to London. Go where he would, and try as he might to enjoy himself—his days were one long dissatisfaction, and his nights a yet longer unrest.

It was while he was in London the second time that his mother's letter came, suggesting that he call on Mrs. Martingale.

More in accordance with his mother's wishes than with his own, he found himself, before the week was

out, at Mrs. Martingale's door. The welcome he received from the cordial little lady quite compensated him for his exertion in going, and almost stirred him from the listless boredom that had become habitual to him. It was when other callers had left them alone together that she said:

"Dear me, Paul, I'm wonderfully glad to see you. It's next to seeing your mother. How is she, and how is all the rest of Hampdon? By the way, Caroline Sanderson is there now, isn't she? You have met her, of course."

"Yes."

"And her cousin, Barbara?"

Carew forced his eyes to look straight into hers.

"Yes."

"Barbara is a dear—and so distractingly charming," continued Mrs. Martingale, with a keen glance. "I've known her from her babyhood days."

"From babyhood!" exclaimed Carew, in surprise. "Why, I thought you didn't know her—only her mother."

"Oh, no, Paul; it's Caroline that I didn't know so well," returned Mrs. Martingale. "As I wrote your mother a while ago I've known Caroline for a comparatively short time, though her mother was an old schoolmate of mine; but Barbara I've known from babyhood days."

Paul Carew thought of these words as he walked back to the hotel a little later.

"Strange," he muttered, "I was sure it was Barbara that she knew so little, and Barbara's mother that she knew so long ago."

Carew fell into the way of going often to the Martingale residence. He came to like Mrs. Mar-

tingale greatly, and he thought her conversation wonderfully entertaining. That this same conversation had for its subject Barbara Sanderson, he did not realize, perhaps. There were delightfully interesting things in Barbara's girlhood days, in her childhood, and even in her babyhood—all of which Mrs. Martingale could tell charmingly.

It was one night at a reception that Mrs. Martingale said hurriedly in Carew's ear:

"Paul, here comes Frank Duvall, the one who's engaged to Miss Sanderson. It's not supposed to be out, so say nothing. I want you to meet him."

Carew's lips tightened. The next moment he found himself looking into a pair of friendly gray eyes, and clasping firm, cordial fingers.

"So this is the man that holds the happiness of Barbara Sanderson in the hollow of his hand," thought Carew, scanning with critical eyes the face of the man before him.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Carew," began Duvall, genially. "I've heard of you through Hampdon friends of mine. You know the Sanderson young ladies, I think."

"I have that pleasure," acknowledged Carew, somewhat stiffly. He had decided at once that he did not like this man. "And you—know them well?"

Duvall laughed, and raised his hand to his pointed beard.

"Indeed," he began, "I thought I did. With Miss Barbara I played housekeeping and mud pies in our pinafore days; with Miss Caroline, my acquaintance dates back three years; but when I heard of their recent escapade at masquerading I concluded there

were yet depths in their nature that I had not sounded."

"Then you've heard of that little game of Miss Caroline's?"

"Yes. I'm a distant connection of the family, and they are good enough to write me occasionally," went on Duvall, with easy nonchalance. "They told me about it themselves. It must have been rich—but I didn't think it of either of them. I wonder that Miss Barbara lent herself to such a wild scheme for a moment."

Carew frowned.

"It was entirely her cousin's idea from the start," he returned with some dignity. "Mrs. Chetwood made the initial mistake, and Miss Caroline insisted upon its not being rectified. She preferred to let matters take their own course."

"But it was for so long!"

"It was a good while," acknowledged Carew. "Even Miss Caroline herself confessed that she had no idea of its being more than a few days before the whole thing would be found out; but, as for us, we never thought of questioning, and each day only added strength to their position. I would scarcely believe it could happen, myself, had I not seen it."

"Still," said Duvall, with a shrug, "knowing Barbara as I do, I don't see how she consented. She is so frank and outspoken, even to unconventionality, at times."

"Is she?" asked Carew, his lips closing with a snap.

"Yes. As I said, I've known her all my life, and time and time again I've been vexed with that girl for always saying exactly what she thinks."

"Indeed," rejoined Carew, his wrath rising.

An interruption came at that moment, and Carew was not sorry to see Duvall turn away.

"So he is pleased to question and criticise his *fiancée's* conduct," thought Carew. "And to me, too, confound him."

CHAPTER XIII

CAREW saw a good deal of Duvall after that first meeting, in spite of his wishes to the contrary. And more than once his temper was tried to the breaking-point by Duvall's way of speaking of Barbara. There were a certain frankness, an easy tone of critical analysis, and a freedom of telling of Barbara's words and actions that angered Carew, and caused him to consider Duvall woefully lacking in delicacy. Of Caroline, Duvall seldom spoke. Indeed, his evident avoidance of the name finally attracted Carew's attention, and filled him with puzzled questioning. He was almost at the point of going to Mrs. Martingale for a solution of the mystery, when a note from that lady was placed in his hands.

Carew shuddered as he opened the envelope, and saw once more the coarsely-penned writing that was already so indelibly impressed on his memory.

MY DEAR PAUL:

Where have you been the past week? Not sick, I hope. I am going out of town for a fortnight—a series of flying visits to half a dozen houses—so I write that you may not have the——

Carew turned the leaf and read the first line at the top of the second page.

about you for your mother's sake.

Carew eyed the words with a mystified frown, then turned back to the first page.

Again had Molly Martingale skipped the second page and returning to it, had written it from side to side with no numbers to guide her readers aright; but this time the lack of sense in the connection speedily pointed to a mistake, and with a smile of understanding Carew skipped from the first page to the third and this time finished the letter without a break.

It was the postscript, however, that brought a sudden cry of amazement from his lips.

P. S.—I saw Duvall last night, and he says his engagement to Miss Sanderson will soon be announced. The dear boy positively radiated happiness. He told me all about his first meeting her three years ago, and of how it was a case of love at first sight—with him, certainly.

M. M.

Carew dropped the letter from his hand; then he snatched it up and read the postscript again, word by word.

What could it mean? It was Caroline that Duvall had known three years, not Barbara; yet there was the postscript staring him in the face, and that postscript unmistakably referred to Duvall's *fiancée*. Was it possible, after all, that it was Caroline who was engaged to Duvall? But no—there was Mrs. Martingale's letter to his mother months ago.

Mechanically Carew's gaze came back to the more recent letter in his hand; then a sudden cry broke from his lips. This letter had been read wrong at first; what if there had been a similar mistake in the other! It did not seem possible, and yet——

Carew closed his eyes and tried to think. He summoned before him Duvall's words and acts and weighed them in the light of this new idea. There was nothing that would deny it; on the other hand, there was much that would tend to confirm it. Mrs. Martingale, also, was brought upon memory's witness stand, and her evidence, too, went to prove that this new version might be the right one. Carew started from his chair and walked the floor, when it occurred to him that there already had been one mistake concerning that letter to Mrs. Carew—he and his mother had obtained an entirely erroneous impression regarding Mrs. Martingale's acquaintance with the two girls. If there had been one mistake, why not another?

Back and forth, back and forth paced Carew, trying to map out a course of action. To go to Mrs. Martingale was impossible now for two weeks. Duvall was equally out of the question; the engagement was not supposed to be known yet. He might write to Mrs. Martingale's town address, to be sure, but, from her letter, he judged that she would not be long in one place and even if her mail were forwarded to her, there was sure to be a vexatious delay in the reply.

It was to Mrs. Martingale, however, that he finally wrote; and after posting the letter, he hurried down the street to send a cablegram to his mother, saying:

Send by first steamer Mrs. Martingale's letter, the one I read.

Long days later the letter arrived and Carew, with shaking fingers, tore open the envelope and spread

the pages before him. Acting upon the supposition that the letter had been written as was the one he had so recently received from Mrs. Martingale, he read the first page, then the third, going back to the second and finishing with the fourth. He almost shouted aloud when he saw how connectedly the pages followed each other; and as he reached the end where Mrs. Martingale spoke of the possibilities as having no chance of becoming probabilities because the "possibility" was already engaged—meaning Caroline—he dropped his face into his hands with a great sob of joy.

If there was still a lingering doubt in Carew's mind, it was forever silenced by Mrs. Martingale's letter which came that night in reply to the one he had sent to her.

MY DEAR PAUL:

Your very remarkable letter of one sentence has followed me about in a way that I know must have proved distractingly trying to your patience. But what do you mean by asking if it's Barbara or Caroline that is engaged to Duvall? I should like to know if all this time you have not understood that it was Caroline—and never any one but Caroline?

Short as your letter was, however, I read lots between the lines, and I know this will be a good-by letter to you, and that I shall not see you when I get back. You will take the next steamer home of course. (I only hope you won't try to walk or swim!) Seriously, dear Paul, I wish you the very best of success, and I'm sure you'll have it.

Very cordially yours,

MOLLY MARTINGALE.

CHAPTER XIV

IN spite of the great joy in Carew's heart on that homeward trip, the thought would come to him at times as to just what might be his welcome from Barbara. There had been a moment when he fancied he could translate the message of Barbara's eyes; but days of silence and weeks of time had passed since then, and if he had read her eyes aright, what must she think of his sudden departure and long, wordless absence?

As he pondered over the situation, he realized that she certainly could not know that he supposed her bound to another when he left. That she must have been puzzled, perhaps chagrined, he understood only too well; but of the full enormity of his conduct as it looked to both Barbara and Caroline, he had not the slightest suspicion. It was accordingly with a measure of confidence that he rang the bell at the Sanderson residence and asked if Miss Barbara Sanderson were in.

"She is not, sir," said the maid.

"Miss Caroline Sanderson?"

"I will see," she replied.

Carew walked slowly into the reception room. The glorified light of eager expectancy that had been on his face when he ascended the steps was gone. The old fear was tugging at his heart, and his knees almost shook beneath him. He had hoped to see Barbara, and now, at the best, only Caroline was to greet his hungry eyes.

"Miss Sanderson will be down directly," said the maid in the doorway; and a moment later Caroline stood before him.

"Good-evening, Mr. Carew," she murmured, with just the degree of warmth that politeness demanded, and just the degree of iciness that dignity deemed indispensable.

Carew at once felt miles away, though he found the girl's slim fingers for a brief instant within his warm clasp.

"Ah, good-evening, Miss Sanderson," he began confusedly. "I am glad to see you. I—I have been away for some time," he finished, saying the worst thing possible from the viewpoint of Caroline's wrath.

"Away? Oh, yes—so you have," smiled Caroline.

"You are most unflattering," remonstrated the man, trying to cut with playfulness the frost surrounding him. "I have been gone nearly three months, and only think how inconsequential I must consider myself after your last remark."

"Really, has it been three months?" smiled Caroline again. "Time does fly, doesn't it?"

"It has not flown for me," retorted Carew, with a sudden direct look into her eyes.

Caroline stirred restlessly. She wished Carew would look somewhere else. She found her role of flippant unconcern difficult in the face of the dumb longing in the man's eyes.

"And did you not enjoy your trip?" she asked.

"It was a business trip, at the start."

"Oh, yes—so you wrote," Caroline murmured, then bit her lip in vexation. She had not meant to refer to that note.

Carew caught at the straw.

"Yes, to your cousin. She is not—in, this evening?"

"No. How is your mother, Mr. Carew? I have not seen her out for the past week."

"She caught cold a few days ago, but is better now, thank you. And your cousin—she is well?"

"I think so."

"You think so! Isn't she with you now?"

"Oh, no; she left me some time ago. But, tell me, did you go to Paris—or anywhere except London? You haven't told me of your trip."

"Indeed, I went anywhere—everywhere—an eternity of wheres," returned Carew, recklessly, with a sudden determination to make a frank appeal to this somewhat baffling young woman opposite. "Miss Sanderson, will you not give me your cousin's address?"

"Oh, she's not in the city at all," rejoined Caroline, pleasantly. "She has gone home. Your 'eternity of wheres' is quite confusing, Mr. Carew. Pray, tell me what does it mean?"

"Surely you understand me," persisted Carew, disregarding her question. "Surely you know that I am more than anxious to learn your cousin's address. Where is her home? Won't you tell me, please?"

For a moment Caroline was silent. She had not looked for just this sort of plea, and she was in doubt how to meet it.

"I—I don't think I do quite—understand," she said gravely, at last.

"Then I'll tell you," returned Carew, in a low voice. "I love your cousin with the whole strength of my being. I want to ask her to be my wife."

"O-oh!" faltered Caroline, quivering with an ecstatic little thrill, notwithstanding her efforts to

regard this presumptuous young man with the calm disdain her reason taught her so richly belonged to him. "Isn't this rather—sudden?" she laughed, taking refuge in the trite phrase to hide her confusion.

"Did I succeed, then, in, concealing my real feelings from you during the days before I went to London?"

"Oh," retorted Caroline, all the old scorn coming back to her voice. "I remember; you were with Houston, Livingstone, and the rest, weren't you?"

Carew grew white.

"I don't think you meant quite that, Miss Sanderson," he said quietly.

"Didn't I?" repeated Caroline, with a shrug. "There was a difference, come to think of it; wasn't there? They stayed, I remember, after the mistake about the rich Miss Sanderson was found out, while you ran away. Yes, there was a difference after all."

Then, and not till then, did Carew understand. The blood swept to his forehead, then receded leaving his face a gray white. He sprang to his feet and took one step toward the still smiling girl in the low chair.

"And you believe—you thought me capable of—that?" He gasped. "Miss Sanderson, for Heaven's sake, tell me where I can find Barbara!"

Again that ecstatic thrill tingled to Caroline's finger-tips; but she stubbornly held her ground.

"Why should I?" she asked. "Do you—deserve it?"

For a moment Carew faced her without speaking; then he dropped back into his chair and covered his eyes with his hand.

"I will tell you the whole story," he said simply, after a time, frankly meeting her eyes. "You shall then be the judge yourself."

It was some minutes later that a very penitent, tearful-eyed Caroline held out two trembling hands.

"You are—splendid!" she choked. "I—I wish I had a dozen addresses of Barbara to give you!"

"Thank you; I—I should much prefer one," choked Carew, in his turn, clasping the outstretched hands and holding them fast in his.

CHAPTER XV

CAREW thought he had never seen a more beautiful spot than the little New England village whose name had been given him by Caroline. The moment he stepped from the train to the platform he began to see all things through the glorified haze cast about them by the nearness of the girl he loved. He smiled at the station-master, beamed on the stage-coach driver, and bestowed a fabulous tip on the boy who carried his bag to the great square room on the second floor of the village hotel.

It was nine o'clock in the evening—too late for a call that night, Carew reluctantly decided, after a judicious survey of the rapidly darkening houses about the hotel; but the earliest possible moment the next morning found him at Barbara's door.

A tall, thin-lipped woman, wearing a calico dress and white apron answered his ring and opened the door a cautious twelve inches.

"Good-morning, sir," she said crisply.

"Good-morning. I——"

Carew hesitated; he was not quite sure of this very self-possessed woman before him. Then he took the bull by the horns.

"I called to see Miss Sanderson—Miss Barbara Sanderson. Will you kindly hand her my card?"

The woman took the bit of pasteboard somewhat gingerly, and ushered its owner into a darkened parlor; then she left the room and rushed breathlessly into the kitchen.

"Barbara, who is it?" she cried, thrusting the card under Barbara's nose.

All the pretty rose color left Barbara's cheeks only to come back in a flood to her whole face.

"It's Mr. Carew, Cousin Hannah, and I—I won't see him."

"Won't see him! Where's he come from?"

"Hampdon, I suppose."

The face opposite darkened.

"Barbara," demanded Hannah, "is that one of those men you were laughing about—the kind that worshiped you while you was rich and then snubbed you?"

"Don't be silly, Cousin Hannah," stammered Barbara. "I—I just won't see him, that's all."

"He is—I know he is," asserted Hannah, with shrewd nods of her head. "And you sha'n't see him either. I'll tell him you're not at home. Now that's all right, ain't it? That ain't a lie, 'cause folks understand. Ain't that what they say in New York, and such places?"

"Oh, Cousin Hannah—would you? could you?" cried Barbara, eagerly.

"You just wait," Hannah retorted majestically, and stalked from the room.

In the parlor she faced the eager eyed young man with impassive calm.

"Miss Sanderson is not at home," she said icily.

"Not—at—home!" stammered Carew. "I—I'm very sorry," he added, rising to his feet. "I—I'll call again."

And he left the house.

Cousin Hannah looked troubled when she went back to the kitchen.

"Barbara," she began, "are you just bound you won't see him—at all?"

"I certainly am," declared Barbara, with tightening lips.

"Then you'll have to run for it."

"Run for it!"

"Yes, ma'am. He's coming back; he said he was—and he looks like the kind that does what he says he will. You might go to Hampdon now for a visit," she hazarded.

"I—I will!" cried Barbara, after a dismayed pause. "I'll go on the three o'clock train. Come—help me pack my things—there's a dear!"

In Barbara's mind at that moment there was but one thought—to avoid Paul Carew at all costs. Why had he sought her out after this long silence she could not understand. Whatever the reason, she could not conceive of its being sufficient to palliate that same silence, or to cause her to forget his abrupt departure from Hampdon weeks ago.

Conscious though she was of her unbounded anger, she yet dared not trust herself to meet Carew face to face—certainly not here. In Hampdon, with Caroline at her right hand to help, and with society to spur her pride—there she might conquer this absurd weakness that threatened to overcome her whenever she thought of Carew's eyes as they had burned into hers that last evening in Caroline's drawing-room. Certainly—to Hampdon she would go!

At fifteen minutes of three that day the lumbering stage-coach called for Barbara and carried her to the station. At exactly three o'clock on the same afternoon, Carew found himself again confronting the tall, thin-lipped woman at the door of Barbara's home.

"Is Miss Sanderson in now?" he asked.

"No, sir, she is not," snapped the thin lips.

"Oh, I'm unfortunate indeed!" cried Carew in keen disappointment. "May I ask—can you tell me when I might find her in?"

A wave of unmistakable triumph flushed the woman's face. The town-clock struck three, and Cousin Hannah, confident now of the success of their scheme, flung caution to the winds.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she vouchsafed. "Miss Sanderson took the three o'clock train to-day for Hampdon."

CHAPTER XVI

IT was a dejected man indeed that slowly walked up the long street toward the hotel. Even when he reached the hotel-office and accosted its proprietor, he was dull-eyed and listless.

"When is the next train for Hampdon?"

"Well," drawled the inn-keeper, "it's s'posed to be at eight o'clock to-morrow morning by this time o' day, most generally; but to-day the three o'clock train hain't gone yet. There's been an accident up to the junction, and the three o'clock's 'most an hour late, they say; and—well, by jimminy!" he finished, as his recent questioner, now alert and bright-eyed, darted through the door and hurried down the street toward the station.

In the shadowy corner of the stuffy little waiting-room sat Barbara alone. Carew opened the door and went straight to her side.

"Oh!" cried Barbara, faintly; then she pulled herself together with all her strength. "Why, Mr. Carew!" Cousin Hannah would have gasped at the surprise in Barbara's voice.

"Miss Sanderson, you—you won't go to Hampdon," pleaded Carew.

"It looks very much as if I wouldn't," laughed Barbara, smoothly, "at this rate of progress, certainly! Do you happen to know just how late that train is?"

"Never mind the train, please," begged Carew

again. "You—you won't go even when it comes, will you?"

There was an almost imperceptible movement of Barbara's eyebrows.

"Why, of course I shall," she laughed. "Pray, what did I come here for, if I didn't want to go to Hampdon."

"But I want to speak to you," began the man, eagerly.

"And you are, are you not?" smiled Barbara.

He made an impatient gesture.

"I mean—I want to speak particularly—to tell you something—to explain—" he stopped suddenly.

"Oh, as to that," retorted the girl, with fine indifference, "there's plenty of chance in Hampdon to talk to me, you know." Then, with sudden animation: "Haven't you been in London, Mr. Carew? Didn't you see Mrs. Martingale?"

"Yes, but——"

"I love Mrs. Martingale," interrupted Barbara, feverishly. "I think her altogether charming; don't you?"

Carew threw a hurried glance about him. There was no one visible save the girl at his side. The ticket window was around the corner out of sight, and the waiting-room door was closed. Taking an envelope from an inner pocket, Carew pulled out a sheet of pale blue, coarsely written note-paper, and opened it before Barbara's eyes.

"Barbara," he began hurriedly.

At the name the girl started and would have spoken had not her eyes encountered a compelling gaze which held them against her will.

"Barbara," repeated Carew, and this time a note of tenderness brought the swift red to the girl's

cheeks, though the eyes still found themselves captive. "I want you to read this letter as I read it weeks ago in Hampdon, the night before I left for London. Read the first page, the second, then the third and fourth."

Hardly conscious of what she did, Barbara took the note and dropped her eyes to the writing.

"From Mrs. Martingale!" she breathed wonderingly.

As she read, the man watched. He saw the wonder give way to puzzled questioning, the questioning to amazement, the amazement to anger. Then before her lips could frame a question after her eyes had finished the last word, he turned the letter to the beginning again.

"Now read the note, please," he said, "as Mrs. Martingale wrote it, and as I read it some days ago in London, the night before I left for home. Read the first page, then this," pointing to the third, "then go back to the second and finish with the fourth."

Again as she read he watched, and this time he saw the light of a sudden comprehension break over her face.

"And you thought—you believed that other was—true?" she demanded.

Carew bowed his head.

"Yes. To me that was your 'secret' and that was the 'false position.'"

"Oh!" breathed Barbara.

At that moment a shrill whistle sounded far down the track.

"Barbara, Barbara," begged Carew, crushing the letter and the hands that held it, in his strong fingers. "You won't go away now! Ah, Barbara, just think

of the long, long weeks that letter lay like lead on my heart—and I loved you, loved you—ah, Barbara, how I loved you!”

There was an instant's hesitation, then the girl raised her eyes to his face.

“No, I—I won't go now,” she began; then breathlessly she cried. “Oh, oh, how could you—here!”

“How could I help it!” laughed Carew, softly. “Sweetheart, there's never a soul that saw us, but—I think I should have kissed you then even if we'd been straight in the middle of New York's Broadway!”

III: A VACATION EXCHANGE

III: A VACATION EXCHANGE

CHAPTER I

OUT in the barn Fred and Anabel talked it over. They were up in the hayloft—their usual resort for such confidences.

“But I don’t see how we are going to do it, Anabel,” Fred was saying. “Folks that have vacations go into the country, and we are already in the country.”

“I know it,” acknowledged Anabel ruefully.

“And there are the boys and girls in the story-books, too,” added Fred. “They are always going back on the farm to their grandmother’s. I don’t see why some of the grandfathers and grandmothers can’t live in the city!”

“They never do,” murmured Anabel. “I never heard of any that did, anyhow.”

“Even the poor folks in cities have vacations,” went on Fred plaintively. “There are those Fresh-Air children down at the Wilsons’—they came from Boston. I—I wish the folks that sent them here would send us to Boston! I’m sure we need it as much as they do.”

“Humph!” exclaimed Anabel. “Susie Hopkins told me that Mrs. Van-something said that we folks here had vacations all the time, just because we lived here. For my part, I don’t see why people make such fuss over just trees and grass. I’d much rather have people and store windows!”

"And fire engines and trolley cars," supplemented Fred.

"And automobiles!"

"And policemen!"

"And houses and houses just as far as you can see," added Anabel, making a wide sweep with her arms. "O Fred, I wish we could go!"

"Let's go ask Aunt Ellen," cried Fred suddenly, swinging himself down from his perch. "Maybe she'll coax Aunt Kate to ask us down there for two weeks. You know we did stay there once for two days, four years ago. You were only six, but I remember it, and 'twas just great! Come on, let's ask her."

Down the stairs, across the barn floor and out into the yard raced four eager feet. Some minutes later they came slowly back toward the barn door, their owners sad-faced and disappointed.

Aunt Ellen had said "No"—kindly but very decidedly. Ask Aunt Kate to take two noisy children in her tiny, little city flat for two whole weeks? Certainly not! That was entirely out of the question.

It was only a week later that Miss Ellen Haywood received a letter from her old friend and schoolmate, Mrs. William Marston, known to Fred and Anabel all their lives as "Aunt Kate." The letter was long and closely written, but not until the fourth page was turned did Miss Haywood suddenly lean forward in her chair and read with closer attention.

"As for a vacation," the letter ran, "I haven't the slightest idea what to do. Sickness, and one thing and another have made our expenses rather heavy this year, so we don't feel that we can spend much money. But

we all need a change, and the children in particular are longing for the country. It costs money, however, to take four people to one of these summer resorts for two weeks, and we feel that it is quite out of the question for us this year.

"Lilian is waiting to take this to the box, so I must close.

"Lovingly yours,

"KATE MARSTON.

"P. S.—It has occurred to me that it would be just like your generous self to invite Ralph and Lilian to the farm for two weeks; so I will tell you right now that I shouldn't allow such a thing for a moment. You have quite enough cares of your own without adding any more in the shape of my children. So, mind, now!

"KATE."

Miss Haywood sat quite still for some time after she had finished reading the letter. She was evidently thinking, and thinking very hard. After a while she rose to her feet, crossed the room and seated herself at her writing desk.

For nine years now—ever since Anabel was one year old—Ellen Haywood had been a second mother to her brother's orphaned children. It seemed to her sometimes that she could not have loved them more had they really been her own. As for the children—to them Aunt Ellen stood for everything that was good and desirable from breakfasts and clean pinafores to kisses and bedtime frolics. Miss Haywood knew this feeling and rejoiced in it; and never was she quite so happy as when planning some pleasant surprise for their enjoyment. She smiled now as she wrote, and she was still smiling when the letter was finished.

At dusk, Jim Dolan, who ran the farm on shares for Miss Haywood, drove to town. In his pocket he

carried a letter directed to Mrs. William Marston. And this was the letter.

"MY DEAR KATE:

"Your letter has given me an idea. I have been thinking it over, and now I am going to give it to you and let you do the same. The case is just this: Your children want to come to the country for a vacation, and my children want to go to the city. We older ones, too, might not object to a little change of air and scene. What do you say to exchanging places for two weeks? We to take your flat in Boston, and you to take our farmhouse here in Fletcherville? We have a good man and woman here now who take charge of the farm itself, so you need not fear that you and Mr. Marston will have too much care.

"My idea is that we each go into the other's house and use it as if it were our own. The expense would be only the fares each way, and the cost of living for the two weeks; yet we should all have a change, and a real vacation from familiar things. We should be ready to 'exchange' by Monday, the first day of July, if you would. Let me hear what you think of the plan.

"Lovingly yours,

"ELLEN B. HAYWOOD."

In the tiny dining-room of the Marston's Boston flat the entire Marston family had met to talk over a certain wonderful letter that had come in the night's mail.

"I'm not sure but that it's a good plan," said Mr. Marston, when the clamorous excitement of Ralph and Lilian subsided sufficiently for him to make himself heard. "It wouldn't cost much—and we should get a vacation."

"How is it, children? Do you really want to go?" smiled Mrs. Marston.

"Want to go!" cried Ralph and Lilian together. "Of course, we do!"

"And they want to come here, too; so it isn't all for us," added Lilian anxiously.

Half an hour later it was settled: they all would be ready to start on July first, remaining at the farmhouse until Saturday of the next week, which would be almost two weeks. It was a very excited boy and girl, therefore, that went to bed in the two little, connecting bedrooms off the hall.

Ralph was almost asleep when the door between the two rooms opened a crack and Lilian's voice called in a hoarse whisper:

"Ralph, won't it be great!"

"Won't it!" crowed Ralph, wide-awake on the instant.

"Only think—trees and grass everywhere, just as if we were living in a park," added Lilian; "and big fields with daisies and buttercups!"

"And fishing and swimming!"

"And places that aren't deep where you wade!"

"And horses!"

"And chickens!"

"And cows!"

There was a pause, then Lilian drew a long breath. "Ralph I don't see how Fred and Anabel can want to leave all those nice things and come to a horrid, hot city!"

"Neither do I."

"And live in six tiny mites of rooms with nothing to look at but brick walls and stone pavements," continued Lilian.

"But they do, Lilian," reminded Ralph anxiously. "They said they wanted to come, and you know they did like it when they were here three or four years ago."

"I know; but we had a house out in Roxbury then," said Lilian. "They never saw this place."

"Pooh! they'll like it: of course they'll like it," asserted Ralph, dropping back onto his pillow. "Anyhow, they've proposed it, and it isn't our fault if they don't have a good time."

"Of course not," agreed Lilian, as she pattered back to bed.

At a little past noon, a few days later, the Marstons and the Haywoods met at the junction of two railroads.

The two trains stopped for a brief ten minutes for refreshments, and the two families made the most of their time. At one end of the luncheon counter Mr. Marston ate apple pie and smiled indulgently at his wife and Miss Haywood who were eating chicken sandwiches and telling each other which cupboards and closets contained dishes, and which contained sheets and tablecloths. Near by, Ralph, Lilian, Fred and Anabel were eating—they scarcely knew what—so busy were they, all talking at once of brooks, fire engines, picnics and trolley cars.

Clanging bells and cries of "All aboard" sent the three Haywoods hurrying in one direction, and the four Marstons in another. Then the great wheels moved and the two trains rumbled out of the station—one carrying the Haywoods toward Boston, and the other carrying the Marstons toward Fletcher-ville.

"Fred and Anabel seemed just as pleased to go to the city as we did to leave it, Lilian," cried Ralph triumphantly, as their train started. "Did you notice?"

Lilian nodded.

"Yes; and, Ralph, did you hear? I tried to get

Anabel to tell me where to pick daisies, and she said: 'Daisies? Why, you can find them in any old place; but I shouldn't think you'd care for daisies after all the pretty things you've seen!' "

"I know," laughed Ralph. "Fred asked me how soon I supposed there'd be a fire. He wants to see the fire engines. As if I knew when the next fire was going to be!"

At half past two the four Marstons stepped from the train to the platform of a small, country station, and climbed into the open stage which they were to take for their two mile drive to the farmhouse.

"Pooh! who'd want a trolley car with this!" exclaimed Ralph.

"H'm, who would!" gurgled Lilian, fairly hugging herself with delight.

At the end of the two miles they found a rambling old farmhouse, and with shouts of delight Ralph and Lilian jumped from the stage and began to explore everything in sight, while Mr. and Mrs. Marston, almost as excited as their children, hurried into the house to find a delightful welcome in the shape of bread, cake, pies and cold chicken in the pantry.

From the very beginning the trip had been a keen delight to both Fred and Anabel. To them everything was wonderfully fascinating, from the brass buttons on the conductor's coat to the chocolates in the newsboy's basket; and it was with dancing feet that they followed their aunt down the car steps when the train rolled into the great North Station in Boston. Everywhere were people, people and more people. Anabel fairly held her breath, and when she reached the great waiting room and found more and yet more people, she gave one long "Oh-h my!"

"Pooh! this isn't much," observed Fred airily, who, being two years older remembered Boston somewhat more vividly than his ten-year-old sister. "You just wait till you see the streets with whole streams of people that never, never stop going!" he finished recklessly, determined to make his statement as impressive as possible.

Outside the station the three climbed up, up, up to the elevated railroad high above the street, which was still more to Anabel's wonderment.

"There! this isn't much like the Fletcherville stage, is it?" cried Fred triumphantly, as their train started.

"I just guess it isn't," retorted Anabel; then she broke off short with a cry of amazement. "Why, Fred, we're going straight down into a hole in the ground!"

"Hm-m," nodded Fred, trying to look unconcerned. "It's the subway, you know. How do you like it?"

There was no reply. Anabel was too absorbed in the wonders of this marvelous "hole in the ground" to speak at all.

At Park Street they changed for an open car and with a cry of delight sped through the long tunnel that reached far ahead with its twinkling lights. Five minutes later they were once more out in the open air trying to look four ways at once as the trolley car whizzed up Boylston Street and Huntington Avenue.

"Why, you just can't see everything," bemoaned Anabel.

"We shall be getting off pretty soon," smiled Aunt Ellen, "then you will have a chance to look about you."

It was not a long walk down the side street to the big apartment house that contained the Marston flat, and Miss Haywood was soon fitting the key that Mr. Marston had given her at the junction into the great front door. To Anabel the leaded glass, shining letter boxes and tiled floor of the vestibule looked very grand. She raised her chin just a little higher,—for two whole weeks she was to live in all this magnificence! She even thought pityingly of Ralph and Lilian who might at that very moment be entering the plain, weather-beaten farmhouse door at home. Then her eyes fell on the row of brass speaking tubes gaping at her just over the letter boxes.

"Aunt Ellen, what are those things?" she demanded, shivering a little—there was something almost uncanny in those round, black holes.

Aunt Ellen laughed.

"Those, my dear, are speaking tubes. If Aunt Kate were here we should press this little button, and that would ring a bell in her hall. Down here I should put my ear to this tube, and by and by I should hear her voice and a little click that would open the door for me—if she wanted me to come in."

"And can we do that?" asked Fred eagerly.

"Certainly."

Fred glanced at his sister. His look said, "Just you wait, Anabel, and see if we don't have fun with that!"

The Marston's suite was on the second floor, and after entering the big door the Haywoods had only to climb one flight of stairs, turn to the right and unlock another door to find themselves in a long, narrow corridor—the Marstons' private hall. With

a whoop of delight Fred and Anabel dashed away on a tour of inspection.

For a time their voices rang out merrily, then there came a long silence. In the dining room Anabel had paused with almost a frightened look on her face.

"Fred, what makes it so dark?" she whispered.

"I don't know. Let's find out," he cried, raising the window and pushing up the screen so that he might lean far out.

Sixteen feet below him was a cement pavement. On all sides, and but a few feet away, rose white-washed walls bristling with windows. Far above was a tiny square of pale blue sky.

"It's a great big chimney with windows in it," announced Fred, excitedly, drawing back into the room.

"It's an air shaft, my dear," laughed Aunt Ellen, coming into the dining room with some dishes in her hand. Miss Haywood, like Mrs. Marston, had found a store of good things to eat in the pantry.

"An air shaft!" cried Anabel, running across the room, and in her turn peering out the window. "And is that all they have to—see?" she asked in a horrified tone of voice.

"That is all they can see from the inside rooms," returned Aunt Ellen with a smile.

Anabel said nothing, but for the second time that day a feeling of pity for Lilian came over her—only this time the pity had nothing whatever to do with Lilian's having to enter the old, weather-beaten farmhouse door at home.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Mrs. Marston called Ralph and Lilian in to eat their first meal at the farmhouse, she had to call three times before she received any response. Then two excited children came from the barn, both talking at once.

"Oh, mother, it's perfectly lovely!" cried Lilian.

"Mother, do you suppose we can stay the whole two weeks?" demanded Ralph anxiously. "You see, I'm so afraid Fred and Anabel will back out and come home. You know there isn't anything down to our house like this—not anything!"

"I know, dear; but perhaps Fred and Anabel want something different," suggested Mrs. Marston.

"But, mother, how can they?" protested Lilian, as she dropped breathlessly down to the well-laden table.

"Now this is living," sighed Mr. Marston an hour later, as he seated himself on the cool porch at his wife's side. "Where are the children?"

"They ran a race to the big tree down the road. Really, my dear, I don't know but 'twas a mistake, after all—this coming here. I don't know how we're going to get them away, contentedly."

Far down the road Ralph and Lilian had found an ant hill swarming with agitated little creatures that had been disturbed by Ralph's foot.

"They look like little black beads strung three on a string, don't they?" cried Lilian interestedly.

For some time the children watched the ants in

silence, then they sprang to their feet and wandered down the road. Suddenly Lilian stopped and looked about her. On both sides of them were trees and bushes; the road had entered a wood. Curious little sounds came out of the shadows, and to Lilian it seemed as if the shadows themselves moved.

"Ralph," she shivered, "we ought to go back. See, it's 'most dark."

Ralph, too, had grown suddenly silent, and had begun to peer cautiously about him.

"Oh, it isn't dark yet," he said, lifting his chin. "Still, we might go back, maybe," he finished with assumed bravery as he turned around.

Once out of the woods the road stretched ahead in a long, unbroken line. Far at the end of it were the dim outlines of buildings, the only ones in sight.

"Is it there? Away there, that we have to go?" demanded Lilian.

"Of course it is," returned Ralph, grown suddenly brave in reality now that the Haywood farmhouse was in sight.

"But they haven't lighted up anywhere," protested Lilian. "There isn't a single street lamp going."

"Pooh!" sniffed Ralph disdainfully. "Who do you think is coming 'way out here from Fletcherville to light street lamps?" he demanded. "Farm folks don't have street lamps."

"You don't mean that it's dark—pitch dark everywhere here all night?" cried Lilian. At Ralph's nod of assent she felt, for the first time in her life, actually sorry for Anabel—who had to live in the dark every night!

At that moment from far up the road came a shrill call. Mr. and Mrs. Marston had suddenly awakened

to the fact that the children had not been seen for some time, and they had come to look for them.

On the stone wall after breakfast the next morning, Ralph and Lilian discussed what they should do for the day. They had not quite decided when they spied a girl and a boy of about their own age coming along the road toward them. The strangers walked more and more slowly, finally stopping not ten feet from where Ralph and Lilian were sitting.

For a moment no one spoke; then the girl in the road said:

"Hello!"

Ralph and Lilian looked at each other. It certainly did not seem polite not to reply to this little girl's greeting; but on the other hand, there were mother's express commands that they must have nothing whatever to do with strange children.

"See here," said the boy fiercely, "didn't you hear my sister speak to you? Why don't you answer? Maybe you think just because you came from the city that we are not good enough for you to notice. I say, hello!"

There was absolute silence from the stone wall. Ralph and Lilian were too amazed to speak. There was a moment's wait, then the girl in the road said angrily:

"I told Anabel Haywood I'd come to see you and show you 'round; but I wish I hadn't, and I'm going straight home!" And she turned and began to march majestically back by the way she had come.

Behind her, however, there was sudden commotion. Ralph and Lilian almost tumbled from the wall with faces suddenly very much alight.

"Do you know Anabel Haywood?" panted Lilian in amazement; while Ralph cried eagerly: "Then

we can play with you, can't we? Who are you, anyhow? What's your name?"

The girl in the road stopped short. She half turned and looked back. The boy answered for her.

"She's Susie Hopkins," he began, his voice still showing some trace of anger; "and I'm her brother, Joe. Anabel said you were coming, and she made us promise we'd come up, 'cause she was afraid you'd be lonesome. And we came; but I guess we'll go back," he finished suddenly, his head once more in the air.

"Go back!" cried Lilian. "Well, I just guess you won't go back! Why, you don't know how glad we are to see you. We are just longing for some one to tell us what to do and where to go!"

Joe hesitated, then smiled sheepishly.

"Been down to the brook?" he asked, turning to Ralph.

Ralph shook his head.

"Then come on," cried Joe; and the boys raced away, closely followed by Susie and Lilian, hand in hand.

Long before supper that first night in the Marston flat, Aunt Ellen lighted the gas in the dining room, and in the narrow, dark hall; and, owing to the excitement of seeing lamps that had neither wicks nor oil, Anabel soon forgot all about that strange air shaft outside the dining room windows. But after she had gone to bed that night, she began to think about it again.

"I wonder if I've got one," she cried softly. "I'm going to see." And forthwith she slipped out of bed and pattered over to the window.

Aunt Ellen had left both shade and window raised for air, and Anabel had little difficulty in pushing up the screen. It was then that she gave an excited little cry and settled herself comfortably on her knees.

Above, below, and on all sides were brightly lighted windows, and in many of them the shades were up, giving views of the rooms beyond. Directly opposite, two boys were playing dominoes. Below, sat a man reading. In another window a woman was fanning herself between nods. In still another a glimpse was caught of a pillow fight between two girls.

For a minute Anabel watched in rapt silence, then she rose to her feet and ran to the door that connected with her brother's room.

"Fred, are you awake?" she called softly.

"Huh?" Fred's voice was sleepy.

"Get up," urged Anabel. "Go look out your window and see if you've got boys and girls and pillow fights and everything. I have!"

"If I've got wh-at?" demanded Fred, now thoroughly awake.

Anabel chuckled.

"Look out of your window!" she said again, and hurried back to her own.

She had scarcely fallen on her knees and taken up her old position, when, close by, another head popped out on a level with her own. She gave a frightened start, then a scream of delight.

"Fred, Fred, why it's you—right here!" she cried joyously.

"Course it is! Our windows are next to each other," returned Fred. "Say, Anabel, isn't this

great? Pooh! who wants to sleep when all this is going on!"

"I thought you'd want to see," crowed Anabel from her window, and she laughed gleefully.

The laugh came back to her with a hollow echo, which so amused her that she tried it again; whereupon Fred, with his hands to his mouth, made the air shaft ring with curious shouts and catcalls just to hear the hollow echo give them back.

The woman woke up, the man stopped reading and the boys ceased their game, but Fred and Anabel paid no heed. Suddenly a screen in a window above banged open, and an angry voice said:

"See here, can't you be quiet down there? What do you mean by making such a racket?"

There was no reply. A somewhat scared boy and girl had drawn back their heads and softly closed their screens.

"Say, Anabel," called Fred in a hoarse whisper from his side of the door, "seems to me folks in Boston are pretty fussy!"

"I should say so!" snapped Anabel, pattering back to bed. "We weren't doing one bit of harm!"

The Haywoods were early astir the next morning, and everyone was eager for the fun to begin.

"I think we'll go around the city today," said Aunt Ellen at the breakfast table. "There are the beaches and lots of trolley rides that can come later; but first I think we'd better see something of Boston itself."

At nine o'clock they started. Fred and Anabel were so excited that they could only dance along on their toes, and even Aunt Ellen scarcely felt the pavement beneath her feet.

It had been Miss Haywood's intention to take one

of the "Seeing Boston" cars or automobiles, and make a tour of the points of interest in and about the city; but long before the Public Garden entrance to the subway was reached, she had decided to postpone such a trip until another time, realizing that merely to see the streets, crowds and store windows was trip enough for that first day.

At Park Street, therefore, they left the car and began to climb the long flight of stairs that led from the subway to the street. It took no little persuasion, however, to get Fred to leave the huge underground chamber with its throngs of men, women and children, and its clanging trolley cars and elevated railroad trains.

"Come, come, Fred," urged Aunt Ellen from the stairway.

"Yes, I'm coming," rejoined Fred, his feet walking one way and his eyes looking another—which promptly brought disaster in the shape of a collision with a stout old gentleman.

"Oh, sir, I beg your pardon," apologized Fred, contritely. "I didn't see you."

"Humph!" growled the old man a little sourly. "I don't see how you could have seen me unless you had eyes in the back of your head!"

Fred laughed—but it was noticed that after that he walked and looked in one and the same direction.

For three hours the Haywoods tramped the narrow, winding streets, with frequent side trips into the big stores, and with many stops before the great plate glass windows. At half past twelve the three entered a restaurant for dinner. The mirror-lined walls and marble floors filled both Fred and Anabel with awed delight, and almost timidly they followed

their aunt to one of the pretty white tables and sat down.

Anabel had scarcely become accustomed to her new surroundings when a white-aproned young woman placed before her a large card covered with the names of more kinds of food than Anabel had supposed there were in the world. For some minutes she stared at the card in silence, as the others seemed to be doing; then she pulled her aunt's sleeve.

"Aunt Ellen, what is it?" she whispered. "What do I do with it?"

"It's the bill of fare, dear. It just tells you what they have for you to eat."

Anabel's mouth fell open.

"But, auntie, there's such a lot of it! I never can eat it all!"

"You don't have to eat it all, dear," explained Aunt Ellen smilingly. "You just pick out what you like best."

"Oh!" sighed Anabel, as she picked up the card. "That will be easy."

It was not easy, however, after all; for one could not eat roast turkey, chicken pie, peach fritters, green peas, corn, asparagus, strawberry shortcake, Washington pie, chocolate pudding, angel cake and ice cream all at once, no matter if one did like them best; and how, pray, was one to select a paltry two or three from all that? It was done, however, at last, with Aunt Ellen's help, and the roast turkey, corn, ice cream and angel cake tasted wonderfully good.

After dinner they walked slowly through one of the cross streets to the Common with its beautiful tree-shaded lawns and paths. Fred, in particular,

was delighted. He knew by heart the story of the boys of long ago who won the victory over the annoying British soldiers; and he gazed at the "frog pond" with almost reverent interest.

From the Common they went to the Public Garden which, in its summer costume of crotons, lantanas, rubber trees and palms, was a veritable paradise of shrubs and flowers.

It was nearly six o'clock when the Haywoods reached the Marston flat, and almost immediately after supper Fred and Anabel went to bed. They thought they had never been so tired in their lives. Fred was almost asleep when his sister's drowsy voice came to his ears.

"Say, Fred, I should think that some time all those people that we saw today would want to get in exactly the same place at exactly the same minute, and, Fred, if they did, what would happen?"

CHAPTER III

ON the second morning their arrival at the farmhouse, Lilian announced that Susie and Joe Hopkins were coming over to take them fishing; and at a little past nine o'clock Ralph, Joe, Lilian and Susie started down the road toward the woods.

"I don't think I'll catch any more than twenty today," volunteered Ralph, after a time. "I want to save some for the next trip."

Joe threw a scornful glance over his shoulder.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Just as if you could tell now how many fish you're going to catch!"

"Well, why not?" demanded Ralph stoutly. "I only said I was going to stop when I had twenty caught."

Joe gave another scornful glance; then he chuckled unexpectedly.

"But what if you don't catch twenty?" he challenged.

"Oh, but I shall," retorted Ralph airily. "I'm going to stay long enough for that."

This time Joe laughed outright.

"Stay long enough!" he retorted. "It takes all day sometimes to catch even one fish; and I have been when I haven't even caught that."

Ralph stopped short where he was.

"All day!" he repeated incredulously, "and not one fish! Why, where's the fun of fishing if you don't catch anything? And you said 'twas fun!"

Joe shook his head.

"I don't know, but—'tis," he said slowly; and though Ralph thought it no answer at all, it is doubtful if he would have obtained a much more satisfactory one from a far older fisherman than Joe.

It was some distance through the woods to the place where the hurrying little brook paused long enough to make a series of broad, quiet pools; but once there, Joe threw down his basket and got out his fishing tackle with a wonderfully professional air.

"There," he said; "now I'll show you!"

In due time four hooks plumped into the water making myriads of little circles that crossed and recrossed each other from shore to shore; and four pair of eyes gazed unwinkingly at a point where line and water met.

One, two, three minutes passed. Lilian hitched restlessly.

"Say, isn't it pretty here?" she began in a hoarse whisper.

"Sh-h!" warned Joe.

Four, five, six minutes passed. Susie coughed gently.

"Sh-h!" warned Joe again, making a much louder noise than Susie had made with her cough.

Seven, eight, nine minutes passed. Lilian hitched a second time.

"Well, if this is what you call fishing," she began in a grieved whisper; but a shout from Ralph interrupted.

"Hi, there! I've got one!" he burst out.

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Joe. "What if you have? Why couldn't you keep still? I had a great big fellow, and he was just going to bite!"

There was no answer. Ralph was on his feet, gazing blankly at his hook which was dangling high in the air.

"Why, I haven't even the bait!" he shrieked.

Joe dropped his pole with a resigned sigh, and arose to his feet.

"Look here! How do you suppose you are going to catch any fish with such a rumpus going on?" he demanded. "Here, let me fix it. You didn't get your bait on properly and the first nibbler walked off with it. There," he finished, as he handed the pole back, "now we'll see!" And he dropped once more into his old position.

It was four o'clock when the fishermen started for home, taking a roundabout way through fields and pastures. Half-way they met Jim Dolan, who had charge of the Haywood farm.

"Hello!" he greeted them. "Where've you been all day?"

"Fishing. Had a tip-top time," returned Ralph gleefully.

"So? How many did you catch?"

Ralph's face fell. He hesitated, and shifted from one foot to the other. Then he uptilted his chin.

"Well, we didn't catch anything, but we had just as good a time as if we had!"

Joe, on the other side of the road, gave a sudden laugh.

"Where's the fun of fishing if you don't catch anything?" he called derisively.

Ralph frowned. Where had he heard those words before? They sounded strangely familiar. Then he suddenly recollected.

"I don't care," he retorted, with a shameful grin, "'twas fun, anyhow!"—which only proves that

Ralph was a very good fisherman, after all, in spite of his empty basket.

"I'm thinking," said Aunt Ellen the second morning after their arrival at the Marston flat, "I'm thinking that today we'll take a trip in that big auto that we saw when we were on the way home yesterday."

"And sit 'way up on one of those big, long seats?" cried Anabel. "And ride without any horse in front?"

"Yes."

"And be hollered at by the man with the big red horn?" supplemented Fred.

"Yes, by the man with the megaphone," rejoined Aunt Ellen, with a smile. "He'll tell us all about everything. We'll take the Historical Tour. I got one of their circulars yesterday, and we'll study history with the real things instead of with books."

Fred looked dubious. The very word history carried a measure of terror. He remembered his last examination.

"We could leave the history trip until later, Aunt Ellen," he suggested hesitatingly. "You know there are other things that we don't want to miss—the beach, and the park where the bears and lions are."

Aunt Ellen laughed.

"Don't worry, Fred. You'll like it all right when we get started," she promised.

It was a short ride to the place where the big automobile was stationed, and the Haywoods were soon climbing into one of the seven long seats that held four apiece. When the huge car started some minutes later it was almost full, and Fred whooped with delight as the big man on the front seat gave a twist

to his wheel, and they were off. But almost immediately Fred's face fell—a second man on the front seat had risen and faced about, lifting the megaphone to his lips as he did so.

"Now for the history and a dozen stupid dates!" thought Fred in vexation; then he suddenly pricked up his ears.

"It was formerly used as a dumping ground," the man was saying; and Fred stared in amazement at the beautifully kept lawns and paths of the Public Garden, and tried to picture all its green loveliness transformed into a heap of ashes, papers and cans.

For only a moment, however, was Fred allowed to think of this, for the auto had reached the old Central Burying Ground, and the lecturer was shouting out the names of some of the people buried there—names which seemed to range all the way from that of a noted portrait painter to the one borne by the originator of a famous soup!

Fred began to get interested. This man with the big red horn might not be much of a terror, after all. Fred even forgot all about the dreaded history, and listened attentively.

Down Tremont Street lumbered the big auto, giving the Haywoods a glimpse of the great gilded dome of the State House, which, when aglow with its thousand lights, the man declared could be seen fifty miles out at sea. The man said something, too, about the whipping posts, and the place where certain witches were hanged. Still more to Fred's amazement, he pointed out the site of John Hancock's cow pasture; and Fred immediately wondered if hundreds of years from now people would be pointing out the Haywood cow pasture to some other boy when Fletcherville should have become a

great city. At the very thought of it Fred swelled with importance. He determined that when he got home he would write something very fine and smart, put it in a bottle, and bury it in a good place, so that when the future generations dug in the old pasture for the foundations of big buildings they would discover it—and read the name signed, “Fred Augustus Haywood.”

So absorbed was Fred in all these delightful plans that he paid scant attention to the lecturer, who was talking about the ancient King’s Chapel, and the two old cemeteries close to the busy street. Not until Scollay Square was reached did he come out of his dreaming enough to realize what the man was saying, and then he became all interest at once, for the lecturer was calling attention to the many streets that came together at that point—like the spokes of a wheel—and saying that this was said to be what gave Boston its name of “The Hub.”

Bump, bump over the cobblestone pavements went the auto, rumbling through the narrow streets until it came to the long bridge that crossed into Charlestown. The greenish-blue water, and the tantalizing glimpses of ships and boats set both Fred and Anabel to asking all sorts of questions; and the bridge, with all its wonders, was not half long enough to suit them.

“It was here that Paul Revere mounted his horse for his famous midnight ride,” announced the lecturer a little later, as the auto passed through a square.

Fred twisted himself about and tried to see the whole square at once—if he looked everywhere, he must at some time be gazing at the exact spot, he reasoned; and he would not miss seeing it for a

good deal. Did he not know from beginning to end the poem:

Listen, my children, and you shall hear
Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,

and had he not spoken it at school not a month before?

On and on lumbered the auto, but Fred did not heed. Famous dates and honored names rattled about his ears from the hollow disc of the megaphone, but Fred did not hear. He was back with Paul Revere on that dark night long ago.

"We will make a short stay at the monument," he heard suddenly, as the auto stopped; and it was then that he came back to the present with a jerk, for before him towered the great granite obelisk that he had always so wanted to see—Bunker Hill Monument.

Down from the auto almost tumbled the twenty-six sightseers, flocking like sheep about the lecturer.

"I'm going to climb to the top!" shouted Fred; but the lecturer shook his head.

"I'm sorry, my boy, but we don't stop long enough for that," he said. "You'd have to climb over two hundred and ninety steps to reach the top."

Fred sighed, and nearly fell over backward in his attempt to send his eyes to that longed-for top where his feet might not go.

And how they trooped about, those twenty-six sightseers, and how they looked, and listened and examined, under a hail of yet more familiar names and dates from the lips of the lecturer!

And Fred? Fred almost clung to the man's coat tails that he might not lose a single word; and all

the while he did not once remember that it was history—neither more nor less than history.

But then—when one can see with one's own eyes the cannon balls that were actually fired in a famous battle; and when one can look up at the towering, sculptured figure of the man who ordered his men not to fire until they saw the whites of the enemy's eyes; and when one is shown the spot where General Warren fell; and the place where stood the old rail fence—when one can have all this, of course, it is not at all as if he were sitting in a stupid history class and droning off a date or two, over which one has yawned the night before. No, indeed!

From Bunker Hill they went to the United States Navy Yard. The big car was not allowed inside the yard, so once more everyone filed down the flight of steps to the sidewalk, and followed the guide from point to point.

To the Haywoods it was all absorbingly interesting, from the entrance gate—which the man said was never without its sentry—to the great drydocks for the big ships. Then came the crowning point of all—the visit to the old "Constitution"—"Old Ironsides,"—the victor in so many battles, and now years past the century mark. Yet how diminutive she looked, after all, for next her was a huge transatlantic liner, six hundred feet long.

From the Navy Yard they went across the bridge to Boston, catching on the way a glimpse of the old church tower where were hung Paul Revere's signal lanterns; and Fred had eyes for but little else while that was in sight. It was not long, however, before he heard the famous name again, for the man with the megaphone pointed out Faneuil Hall, and called

attention to its grasshopper weather vane made by that same hero, Paul Revere.

Up Washington Street—the “busiest, crookedest and longest street in New England,” the man called it—rumbled the auto, and both Fred and Anabel declared it was certainly “busy” enough and “crooked” enough to win the name; and as the man had said it stretched for seventy miles without change of name, they could not doubt its being the longest as well.

On and on, past the curious old State House, and the Old South Meeting House—with its story of the famous Boston Tea Party—on and on went the auto until the Haywoods had seen and heard so much that they were not sorry when the big car stopped at the end of the trip.

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE leaving home Ralph and Lilian had laid in a generous supply of firecrackers and other fizzing things for the Fourth of July. There were also a few rockets which had been provided by Mr. Marston; these, however, were intended as a surprise, and neither Ralph nor Lilian knew anything about them.

"How early may we go outdoors?" Ralph had asked just before going to bed the night of the third.

Mrs. Marston looked at her husband and smiled a little.

"Why, I think—as soon as you wake up," she said slowly.

Ralph opened wide his eyes. Then he gave a joyous shout. In Boston five o'clock was the earliest he ever had been allowed on the street.

"Lilian," he called excitedly as he hurried upstairs, "mother says we may go out as soon as we wake up, and I'm going to get right up at the very first cracker!"

"Oh, so am I!" exclaimed Lilian. "Won't it be great fun! I never was out in the middle of the night, and I always wanted to be!" And she made ready for bed with all haste, that she might get all the sleep she could before that first cracker went off.

When Ralph awoke the next morning the sun was shining straight in his face. He scowled and tried to cover his eyes with the sheet, then he suddenly

remembered what day it was. With a cry of dismay he bounded out of bed and ran to the window.

Down in the yard were a hen and seven chickens, the only living things he could see. To his ears came a series of clucks and sharp little peeps, the only sounds he could hear. Up the road, down the road, not a house was in sight. For the first time Ralph realized that the Haywoods did not have a neighbor nearer than the Hopkins family, half a mile through the woods. With a disappointed frown on his face Ralph dressed himself and walked slowly downstairs. On the side porch he found Lilian.

"Awfully jolly, isn't it?" she said dolefully.

"Isn't it!" retorted Ralph. "Now I know why Joe Hopkins grinned so yesterday when I asked him what time they let the noise begin."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing; only just giggled, and said I'd find out."

"Well, we've found out all right," sighed Lilian. "It just doesn't begin at all. There isn't a soul in sight!"

After breakfast Ralph and Lilian went onto the porch with their firecrackers and sat down on the steps. Three big crackers and four little ones had been listlessly disposed of when Ralph asked almost crossly:

"Wasn't Joe or Susie coming over to-day?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe they would have come if we'd asked them to."

"Maybe. I didn't think. I expected there'd be plenty of other things going on without them, I suppose." Lilian's voice was not so cheery as usual, for some reason.

There was a long pause. Lilian, on the lower step,

fidgeted from one side to the other, then sprang to her feet.

"Let's hunt hens' eggs," she cried with forced enthusiasm.

Ralph shook his head impatiently.

"Who wants to hunt hens' eggs on the Fourth of July!" he exclaimed.

At eleven o'clock Joe and Susie Hopkins walked into the yard. They were dressed in their best clothes, and announced with great glee that they had come to dinner. Five minutes later a carryall drove into the yard and four children jumped to the ground and were somewhat shyly introduced by Susie.

"We've all come to dinner, you see," she exclaimed. "And there are lots more. It's a surprise!"

There were, indeed, lots more, and thicker and faster they came until almost thirty boys and girls greeted Mrs. Marston's startled eyes in the doorway.

"They've come to dinner, all of them!" shouted Ralph gleefully. "It's a surprise!"

With a low cry Mrs. Marston turned and fled to her husband.

"William, what in the world shall I do?" she cried. "That yard is full of children, and they've come to dinner. We've eaten up almost every single thing in the house. I was going to bake, to-morrow. William, what shall I do?"

With a sharp ejaculation Mr. Marston sprang to his feet.

"You don't mean to say they've come now!" he exclaimed. "Why, I asked them for to-night!"

"You asked them!" gasped Mrs. Marston, falling limply into the chair behind her. "And you didn't tell me! William, how could you!"

"But 'twas to be a surprise!"

"A surprise!" Mrs. Marston's tone spoke volumes. "Well—it is!"

"But you don't understand, dear. I knew just how quiet 'twould be for the children to-day, so yesterday I had Jim drive all around and invite all the boys and girls he could find to come to a surprise party to-day. Then I went down to the village and got the hotel people to promise to send out a lot of sandwiches and cake and ice cream, and all that sort of thing. Of course, I wasn't going to have you work yourself to death, and I thought we could afford this one treat. But I asked them for to-night, not this noon. I don't understand it. I told Jim to tell them to come a little while before dinner—you know I've got those few fireworks to set off as soon as it's dark."

A sudden light of understanding came into Mrs. Marston's eyes.

"William, I know just what 'twas. You said 'dinner,' and everybody here has dinner at noon, and, of course, they are coming now! But that doesn't help me out," she said dolefully. "William, what shall I do?"

Mr. Marston shook his head.

"I don't know," he began hesitatingly. "There's a chance, of course, that the hotel people—I said 'dinner' there, I suppose, just as I did to Jim; and——"

A heavy knock interrupted. A moment later Mr. Marston faced a tall young man at the side door.

"Be you the man that wanted a lot of stuff sent up from the hotel for——"

"Yes, yes, oh, yes, bring it in quickly!" interrupted Mrs. Marston breathlessly.

"And she acted as if she hadn't seen a thing to eat for a week!" said the young fellow afterwards, telling the story to his friends. "And she treated me as if I was her long-lost brother that she never expected to see again!"

And what a day it was—that Fourth of July! There were the merry games, the good things to eat—both at noon and at night—and last, but by no means least, the wonderful fireworks set off by Mr. Marston.

At nine o'clock, after the last guest had been called for, Ralph and Lilian climbed the stairs to their rooms. It was then that Lilian grew suddenly sober.

"Ralph," she began tragically, as she stopped just outside her door, "to-morrow's the fifth, and the next day's the sixth, and the next is the seventh, and then 'twill be half gone—our vacation. Only think—half gone!"

Fred sighed.

"I know," he said. "If only we could stay here always—always!"

Lilian gave a quick cry. Ralph's words seemed to have given her a sudden idea. She clutched her brother's arm eagerly.

"Ralph, why can't we—really—stay always?"

"Pooh!" snapped Ralph. "Don't be silly, Lilian. It has to end in two weeks, of course. Besides, if it didn't it would have to later, because there's school."

"Oh, we could go to school here," retorted Lilian.

"Here!" ejaculated Ralph, plainly amazed.

Lilian nodded triumphantly.

"Ralph, listen!" she cried. "We've exchanged for two weeks, and we like it. Now why not keep on exchanging right along?" And she leaned back

against the door casing with an air that said: "Find fault with that scheme if you can!"

Evidently Ralph could, for he began to object at once.

"But the Haywoods!" he protested.

"They wanted to go to Boston just as much as we wanted to come here," retorted Lilian. "I know they'd like it. Anyhow, I'm going to write to Anabel."

"But there's father and mother, and there's father's work in the store!" exclaimed Ralph, still unconvinced.

"They like it here, you know they do," asserted Lilian. "And only last night mother said she just couldn't bear to think of that hot city. As for father—he's digging in the dirt half the time, and I just know he'd like it better than behind any old counter. He can buy the farm, and Miss Haywood can take our flat in Boston. Why, Ralph, don't you see? It's just as easy!"

To tell the truth Ralph did not quite see, but he wanted to see very much, and it took only a little further argument on Lilian's part to make him almost as enthusiastic as herself.

"Anyhow, I'm going to write to Anabel to-morrow first thing, before we go on the picnic," declared Lilian as she pushed open her bedroom door.

It had been a very tired boy and girl that had gone to bed in the Marston flat that third of July after a day of sightseeing, and tired eyes had closed almost as soon as tired heads had touched the pillow.

Before coming to Boston, Fred and Anabel had laid great plans for the Fourth, but now that they were already there they had quite forgotten that the

great day was so near. When Anabel awoke, therefore, long before daylight on that Fourth of July morning, and heard the drums, bells, horns and explosions big and little, she wondered what had happened. Even in her room, with its airshaft window, the din was no small matter, and she bounced out of bed with a frightened cry.

Were those bells fire bells? But what could the rest be—those drums and horns and noises like pistol shots? Then suddenly she remembered.

"It's the Fourth. It's the Fourth!" she screamed. "Fred, Aunt Ellen, the Fourth's begun, and I forgot all about it. Get up, right away. I don't want to lose a bit of it, not a single bit of it!"

And she did not lose a single bit of it; at least she began that very minute to fill every moment with fun, frolic and noise.

At half past eight, breakfast over, Fred, Anabel and Aunt Ellen boarded the trolley car at the end of the street.

"We will go to the beach," Aunt Ellen had said, and already Fred's and Anabel's eyes were big with the anticipation of seeing nothing but water as far as one's gaze could reach—neither Fred nor Anabel had ever seen the ocean.

But even the ocean was almost forgotten during the next hour, so absorbing was the journey to it; and both Fred and Anabel regretted more than ever that they could not look four ways at once. Everywhere were boys, bands, flags and parades, and everywhere were the jostling crowds of a great city out on a holiday.

But when the beach, with its long stretches of white sand and its far-reaching blue water, was gained neither Fred nor Anabel had eyes for any-

thing else. Nor were they content to sit up in one of the pavilions—they begged to go down on the beach itself and sit on the sand, where they might get a nearer view of the bathers. Gradually, however, Anabel's eyes looked less and less often at the bathers and more and more frequently at the tumbling waves. She had made a somewhat alarming discovery—the wet sand line was whole inches nearer than it had been when they first sat down.

What could it mean, Anabel asked herself. Had the ocean broken its bounds, and would the waves creep on and on until they had covered the beach, the street, the town, the whole world? Anabel's imagination was very active just then.

Close to Anabel's hand lay a small stick, and this stick gave her a sudden idea. She would throw it just in front of her on the dry sand, and then watch. Perhaps, after all, she had only imagined that those waves were coming nearer. Some minutes later everyone near the Haywoods was startled by a sharp scream. Anabel was on her feet, her eyes wild and frightened.

"Aunt Ellen, Aunt Ellen," she was crying, "those waves are coming nearer! See, the last one came 'way up here and carried off my stick!"

Aunt Ellen had to laugh, though she tried to stop as she saw Anabel's grieved face. Afterwards, when they had moved to a place farther back on the sand, she told the wonderful story of the tides; and Anabel ceased to fear that the waves would creep on and on until they had covered the earth.

Soon after this the Haywoods left the beach itself, and began to explore the long line of attractions facing the street. At one o'clock they ate their luncheon on the beach, and after that they entered

the big amusement park and saw more wonders than they had ever dreamed of. Later Fred and Anabel mounted two of the merry-go-round horses, and thought it the most wonderful ride in the world until they tried the scenic railroad; then they knew it was not, for the way their car shot up and down the steep inclines, whizzed around corners and in and out of dark caverns almost took their breath away.

As if this were not enough, there were the miniature floods, fires and volcanoes to be seen; and there was the amazing experience to enjoy of shooting down an incline in a boat and landing with a delightfully exciting splash in a big pool of water. Certainly it was a wonderful day; and at night came the crowning joy of all—the fireworks on the Common.

On the day after the Fourth, Miss Haywood took Fred and Anabel shopping. It was not an entire success, for in the face of the multitude of fascinating things to be seen and to be heard, it was no small task to keep both the children moving in the same direction at the same time, and also in the direction she wished to go herself.

If Fred could have had his way he would have spent half his time riding up and down in the elevators; while Anabel wished never to stay more than a minute in one place, being always in a hurry to see something just beyond. Under these circumstances it is not strange, perhaps, that Miss Haywood did not find it very easy to do her shopping; and at night it was a question which was the more tired, she or the children.

When the Haywoods woke up the next morning they found it raining.

"Well, chickabiddies, this doesn't look much like

sightseeing to-day, does it?" asked Aunt Ellen as she served the hash at breakfast; then her face grew suddenly grave. "I'm wondering, dears," she went on hesitatingly, "if you supposed you could stay here alone for a little while? Two things that I bought yesterday are not right and must be changed; and I would rather not have you with me this time. I shall go as quickly as possible."

"Of course we can," cried Fred, with some scorn. "Why, there isn't anything that could happen to us right here in the house."

"You're sure then that you'll be all right—that you won't be afraid," interposed Aunt Ellen smilingly.

"Afraid? Of course not!" cried both the children; and some minutes later Aunt Ellen started off, leaving behind her many admonitions regarding lights, stairs, windows and gas stove.

For a time, merely to be alone in the flat was excitement enough for Fred and Anabel; then Anabel proposed that she go downstairs to the speaking tube and pretend she was a caller to be let in. It was a great success, and they promptly tried it again, only this time Fred went down to the vestibule. For almost an hour they played the game, announcing everything they could think of, from just a simple caller to the doctor and the policeman. By that time the flight of stairs had grown very long to both pairs of weary little legs.

"Now I'll hide and you find me," suggested Fred, and Anabel agreed joyfully.

They were deep in the delights of this when a peculiar ring of the doorbell interrupted.

"The postman!" cried Anabel. "I choose to go!"

And she threw open the hall door and rushed downstairs.

"Ho, you can't get into the box!" yelled Fred after her as he reached up to the little hook by the door and took down the letter-box key. The next moment he was bounding down the stairs two steps at a time.

When the box was opened there was just one letter inside—the one Lilian had written the day before.

"It's mine!" cried Anabel joyfully; "and from Lilian, too. Quick, let's hurry upstairs and read it. I'll get there first!" And she flung herself against the hall door, only to fall back in consternation—the door would not open!

"Why, Fred, it's locked!" she gasped.

Fred's face fell. He was very much frightened. He understood only too well the seriousness of the situation.

"We—we ought not to have shut it," he stammered.

"But it wasn't locked when we came through a minute ago," protested Anabel. "It opened right away."

"But, Anabel, don't you see? It's one of those locks that will open on one side, but not on the other," explained Fred a little impatiently.

"Oh!" said Anabel, her wistful eyes on the row of eight speaking tubes which seemed to be making mouths at her from the wall. Suddenly her face brightened. "Why can't we ring some other person's bell, then," she demanded, "and ask them to let us in?"

"Of course we can," cried Fred in relief. And he began to read aloud some of the names above the round, black holes. "James A. Smith, C. F. Bean,

George H. Wilbur, Thomas Benton—well, anyhow, let's begin with Smith."

It was easy, but not quite so easy as it seemed, for Fred had to ring three bells before he got any answer to his request to be let in. Anabel was already at the door, her hand on the knob, and almost at the first click she pushed the door open.

"There!" exclaimed Fred, "now we're all right." But at the head of the stairs he stopped short in dismay—the suite door, too, was fast closed.

"I—I must have shut it without thinking," he stammered; "or maybe 'twas the wind. Anyhow, it's shut—and we can't get in."

Anabel frowned and sighed impatiently.

"Well, I know what I think of doors and locks that have two sides to them," she declared indignantly. "They're just like Annie Maycumber—wonderfully nice to your face, but meaner than dirt to your back!"

Fred laughed, and in some way the laugh seemed to clear the air.

"Never mind, Anabel, Aunt Ellen'll come soon," he comforted. "Let's go down on the front steps and wait for her. It stopped raining long ago, you know."

"And there's my letter, too; we'll read that," cried Anabel. And, once more smiling, she followed her brother down the stairs.

CHAPTER V

IT was the morning after the Fourth that Ralph and Lilian, piloted by Joe and Susie, went for their promised picnic. Up Tompkins' Hill, over the top and down the other side they trailed, coming to a delighted pause at the edge of a small lake.

Joe carefully set his luncheon basket in a cool place, and placed Ralph's beside it.

"Seems to me," began Ralph, but a scream from his sister interrupted him.

"Quick, come here, all of you," she cried. "Here are a lot of those funny little bead bugs, and they're all crowding together in one spot, as if they were trying to get strung on one string!" she finished laughingly.

"Bead bugs!" exclaimed Joe, running forward. "Why, what—pooh! they're only ants," he finished scornfully.

Lilian did not seem to hear. She was entirely too absorbed in watching the ants.

"Look!" she called excitedly. "They aren't all black as the others were. They're made of part red beads, and—oh!" she broke off in still greater excitement, "there are some black ones! There are two kinds, and they are fighting!"

"Fighting!" cried the others—even Joe was interested now.

"Sure enough, they are," he said, his eyes on the struggling mass of agitated little bodies. "They're all pulling at something. Steady, steady—here she

comes! Say, it's a black ant! They're routing them out of the nest. That's what it is!"

"Joe," called Susie from behind Ralph, in new excitement, "they're coming from 'way over here somewhere. My, what a lot of them! They're coming to help out, as sure as you're alive!"

It seemed so, indeed. From somewhere up the bank came a steady stream of the red-and-black ants, all hurrying very fast, and all headed straight toward the scene of battle. At the nest they swarmed in countless numbers. Every little while a big black ant would be seemingly hauled into sight only to be attacked by a dozen of the enemy and chased far away from the nest.

"Look!" cried Joe, as a particularly large black ant appeared. "That's the big king of them all, I'll warrant. Just look at them go for him!"

"Oh, dear, they've killed him—the poor thing!" shivered Lilian. "He's quite dead!"

Evidently the red-and-black ants were of the same opinion, for they left the big, black fellow lying stiff and still, and turned back to the nest. But Lilian, whose eyes and sympathy had not strayed from the black ant, saw the motionless body suddenly come to life and scurry away to the shelter of a small stone.

"He got away!" she crowed. "He wasn't dead!"

"Humph! playing possum," grunted Joe; then his voice changed suddenly. "Quick, see!" he cried. "What are they lugging out of the nest now?"

There was scarcely a black ant in sight by this time. But from the nest were swarming red-and-black ants carrying curious yellowish-white objects about the size of a barleycorn. They were not fighting now. They had other business on hand; and it was not long before the children saw another proces-

sion of ants—going away from the nest this time—and each with its yellowish-white burden fast held in its jaws.

"I know. Those white things are going to turn into little ants," cried Joe excitedly; "and these fellows are kidnapping them and are going to make slaves of them! Teacher told us all about it last summer."

"Oh, my!" chorused three awe-struck voices; and Lilian added: "I declare, I just feel sorry for those black ants; and if I could I'd take away every one of those little, white things and keep them myself; but I don't know anything about bringing up baby ants!"

It was not long after this that the luncheon baskets became more interesting than the ants were. Later, when all the children came back to the battle ground, they found it quiet and almost deserted except for the presence of a few red-and-black ants, left, Joe said, on guard. But when Lilian picked up a small stone to throw into the water, she gave a sudden cry, for under the stone were a dozen black ants that had fled to its shelter for safety. There was a general scurrying of little, black legs in all directions. A minute later only the red-and-black ants were in sight.

It did not rain in Fletcherville the next morning as it did in Boston, but it was very warm.

"It's to-day that Anabel gets my letter," said Lilian, as she and Ralph sat under the big maple tree in the Haywood yard. "I wish I could see her when she reads it."

"So do I!" echoed Ralph.

"Oh, she'll like it all right," went on Lilian confidently. "You know she was just crazy to go to

Boston, and of course she'll be crazy to stay when she finds there's such a good chance. But I should like to know what she says when she gets the letter. Sh—h!" she warned hurriedly, "mother's coming, and she must not know—yet!" And Lilian rose to her feet with a particularly innocent air as her mother came out of the house with pails and luncheon baskets. The whole family was going raspberrying that day, and ten minutes later the house and the yard were deserted.

Fred and Anabel found the great stone steps of the apartment house quite dry when they came down from the Marston flat on the morning they were locked out.

"And now for Lilian's letter," cried Anabel. "I do hope she doesn't want to come back before the two weeks are up. Only think, Fred—wouldn't it be dreadful if she did?"

Fred jerked his head emphatically, and Anabel tore open the letter.

"Dear Anabel," she read aloud. "How do you like it? We think it's splendid, and we would like to exchange right along. We thought perhaps if you liked it, too, that we would ask father to buy the farm and let you have our flat in Boston. We are going to tell our folks, and you can tell your aunt. We thought we would not do it, though, until the last minute, so as to surprise them.

"Your loving friend,

"LILIAN MARSTON."

"Well, that doesn't look much as if she wanted to come back!" crowed Fred, when the letter was finished. "I think there won't be any objection down here to swapping right along; will there, Anabel?"

"I'm sure there won't!" declared Anabel. "Only think, Fred—live here always! I don't see how Ralph and Lilian can be willing to give it up!"

"I know it," murmured Fred. He hesitated, then asked, "But how about Aunt Ellen?"

"Oh, she'll be all right," asserted Anabel. "Didn't she say only yesterday that it was such a comfort to go shopping where they kept something, instead of in those little, tucked-up Fletcherville stores? You needn't worry about her. She'll just jump at the chance to stay!"

"Then that's all right," settled Fred, brightening; "and we'll do as Lilian said, not tell her till the last so as to surprise her."

At that moment from the avenue came the clang of bells. Then with a swirl of dust and smoke a fire engine dashed into view.

"It's a fire! It's a fire!" shrieked Fred. "Come on, quick!" And with a bound he was off the steps and racing down the street, Anabel closely following.

From all directions came hurrying men, women and children; and Fred and Anabel found themselves swept along with the crowd. To Fred and Anabel, however, this was no hardship so long as it brought them nearer to those fascinating monsters of fire and smoke. After a time, though, the policemen began to force the crowd back. The fire was becoming more serious, and a second alarm had been rung in. Fred and Anabel could not see nearly so well now, and they were beginning to be very warm and tired.

"Pshaw! Let's go home and see if Aunt Ellen hasn't gotten back," suggested Anabel. "It isn't a mite of good staying here."

"All right," agreed Fred. "Come on."

For some time they hurried along without speaking; then Fred stopped at a corner.

"Which way was it, Anabel? Is this where we turned?" he asked anxiously.

Anabel shook her head. She was beginning to look frightened.

"I don't know," she faltered.

For another five minutes they trudged along in silence, then Anabel almost sobbed:

"Fred, it wasn't nearly so far. We must have passed it. I'm just sure we're lost!"

"Lost! Not a bit of it," cried Fred. "'Course we'll find it. We didn't go far."

"Well, why don't you ask somebody?" chattered Anabel. "Somebody that lives here? We don't know where Aunt Kate lives."

Fred's face cleared.

"Why, of course; I forgot I could," he cried. "Here comes a man. Say, mister," he called, running across the street, "whereabouts around here does my uncle William live, please?"

The man stopped and turned his head.

"Your uncle William!" he growled. "How do you suppose I know who your uncle William is?"

"That was stupid of me; wasn't it?" laughed Fred merrily. "And he isn't even my uncle, either—only make-believe. He's Mr. Marston, sir. Mr. William Marston."

"Don't know him," snapped the man as he turned away.

Four more men were questioned, but with no better results. Then Anabel lost her patience.

"Why, there doesn't anyone seem to know Uncle William," she complained. "I should think some one would!"

"Maybe some one knows Ralph or Lilian, if they don't know Uncle William," suggested Anabel suddenly as she saw a little girl coming toward them. The girl was barefooted and poorly dressed, but to the farm-bred Anabel this was not anything unusual.

"If you please, little girl, do you know Lilian Marston?" asked Anabel timidly, as the stranger came within speaking distance.

The girl addressed stopped and stared; then shook her head. Another girl, still more ragged and forlorn, came up unnoticed and stopped to listen.

"Say, you can talk all day if you want to, but 'twon't do you much good," she volunteered. "Teresa's an Italian. She doesn't know English. What's up?"

Anabel turned quickly.

"Oh, maybe you know Lilian Marston, or Ralph?" she cried.

"Not a bit," rejoined the other cheerily. "What you want? Got lost?"

"Yes, and we're so hungry!" almost sobbed Anabel. "And Aunt Ellen'll be sure to be there, and she'll worry. It's dinner time, too; isn't it?"

A strange look came into the thin, little face opposite.

"Shouldn't wonder if 'twas, for them that has dinner!" said the girl, with a short laugh. Then her manner changed. "Look a-here, can't you remember the street, or anything, where you live?"

"No," said Fred gloomily. "Not a thing."

"Nor any piece of paper or anything with it on?"

Anabel clapped her hand to her belt with a sudden cry.

"My letter!" she exclaimed joyfully. Then her

face fell. "It's lost. I must have dropped it. Oh, dear, I'm so sorry!"

"Of course you might come with me," began the girl slowly, "if——"

"Oh, thank you," interrupted Anabel, "we'd love to."

"You see, if you'll just give us our dinner we'll feel more like going on hunting," put in Fred. "And to-morrow we'll ask you to our house. I'll tell Aunt Ellen you're coming."

The girl laughed oddly, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Humph!" she said. "Well, we'll go home and see Mother Moll, anyhow. Maybe she'll know what to do for you."

Fred and Anabel needed no second invitation. Nothing had been said on the little girl's part about dinner, to be sure, but Fred and Anabel did not doubt that at the end of the way a loving mother would bid them welcome to a well-filled dinner table—just as would have been the case in their own home had this little girl been lost in Fletcherville.

Noisier and dirtier grew the streets, yet the girl still sped on.

"Here we are," she announced at last, turning into an alleyway, and bounding down a short flight of steps.

Fred and Anabel drew back.

"What, there?" they gasped.

The girl ahead did not notice. She had pushed open the door and was calling to some one out of sight.

"Mother Moll, Mother Moll, I've brought two children that are lost, and they're hungry. Did you get anything to eat?"

"Course I did," replied a cheery voice. "Bring 'em in!" And a tall, freckled girl about fourteen years old came out of the basement room, and beckoned the children to enter. "I reckon we have something to eat," she reiterated, bustling ahead. "I found a nickel down on Dover Street, and got another one doing errands. We've got bread and frankfurters, and there's two bananas—the fruit man threw them away, but there's some good in them. Here, you sit here," she went on hospitably placing a broken chair for Anabel; "and here's one for the boy. Kit and I can take the boxes."

Scarcely conscious of what they were doing, Fred and Anabel seated themselves and looked about them. Only a little light came through the narrow window, but there was enough to show the bedstead in one corner, a mattress on the floor in another, a table, a stove and a few broken dishes on a shelf.

"And do you live here—all the time?" faltered Anabel, as Mother Moll thrust into her hand a plate containing a piece of very dry bread and a greasy frankfurter.

"Well, we shall if we can," returned Mother Moll cheerfully. "But you see it costs quite a lot, and we don't get much money. There are four of us—the two boys, Kit and me. I'm the biggest, so they call me 'Mother Moll.' The boys sell papers and black shoes and run errands for the doctor, and I get what money I can, too. You see, it's such a nice, big, roomy place here that we hope we can keep it, with the doctor to help us."

"Oh!" faltered Anabel, who was trying to be very polite and eat what was set before her. Hungry as she thought she was, however, she could only nibble

at the dry bread. She looked at her new friends in amazement to see the way the food disappeared down their throats.

"My, doesn't it taste good!" cried Kitty, as if in answer to Anabel's thoughts. "You see, we had a hard day yesterday, and we didn't have anything for supper nor for breakfast this morning. But who cares now when we've got all this!"

Anabel dropped the bread in her hand.

"You don't mean that you didn't have any supper or breakfast?" she gasped.

"And you asked us here, and let us eat up your dinner when it's all you've got?" cried Fred. "Anabel, we mustn't eat another bite—not a bite," he finished in consternation.

"Of course not!" exclaimed Anabel, hastily putting aside her plate. "And to-morrow you must all come and take dinner with us—that is, if we ever get home," she choked in sudden remembrance.

"Sure enough, Kit did say you were lost, didn't she?" cried Mother Moll. "Well, let's hear all about it, and we'll see what can be done."

Once in possession of the facts, Mother Moll was quick to act. She was a very wise little person for a girl of fourteen, and she was used to emergencies, having been the head of the little family ever since her mother's death, three years before.

"We'll go straight to the drug store on the corner, and look up Mr. William Marston in the directory," she said promptly; "and then Kit shall take you home. You can't lose Kit in Boston!"

It was almost four o'clock when three tired children turned into the cross street and hurried toward the big apartment house in which was the Marston

flat. On the steps stood an anxious woman who ran forward with a glad cry.

"Darlings! Where have you been? I've searched the whole neighborhood, and I've just telephoned the police station."

"We got locked out and went to a fire and got lost," explained Fred breathlessly.

"And this is Kitty, and she found us," announced Anabel; "and she and Mother Moll gave us our dinner when they hadn't had anything to eat since yesterday noon. And, auntie, wasn't it perfectly lovely of them?"

"It certainly was," said Aunt Ellen, her voice shaking a little as she looked at Kitty's small, pinched face. "Come in, my dear, with Fred and Anabel. I want to talk to you." And she led the way up the steps.

CHAPTER VI

SUNDAY was a very quiet day, both in the Marston flat and in the Haywood farmhouse. In Boston, Fred and Anabel went to church in the morning, and spent the afternoon very contentedly with their books. Kitty and Mother Moll did not come to dinner. Aunt Ellen had suggested that they wait a day or two for that; but she wrote down their address and said that she herself would go to see them Monday, and that later, if it could be arranged, they all should come out for the day. And Fred and Anabel agreed that this was the better plan.

In the farmhouse at Fletcherville the day was equally quiet. The whole family went to the Fletcherville church for the morning service. But bright and early Monday Joe and Susie appeared with their luncheon baskets, ready for a picnic.

"And where are you going this time?" Mrs. Marston smilingly asked. "I should think there'd be scarcely any places left."

"Oh, there are lots of them," protested Susie. "And we shall not finish them all by Saturday, either. There'll be heaps they won't see."

Lilian glanced at Ralph; and Joe, who was watching, saw that they tossed their heads and looked suddenly very conscious, but he could not hear Lilian's whisper, "What if they knew we were going to stay here always!"

In the pine grove on the top of Peak's Hill the

picnickers spread their luncheon where they could get a fine view of the river and the village.

"I know what we'll do," cried Joe, as he reached for a ham sandwich. "We'll go down to Peak's Pond after luncheon. It's a fine place, and we'll get Aunt Peggy to sing to us and tell us stories."

As usual, there was no opposition to Joe's plan, and the four were soon trailing down the hill with Joe in the lead. They had almost reached a little clearing when Lilian, who had chanced to turn her head, clutched Joe's arm.

"Joe, who's that? Quick, look!" she whispered.

Coming toward them was a curious, bent old woman. She carried a stick and was poking about among the tangled vines and bushes; and all the while she was mumbling something under her breath.

"Why, it's old Peggy herself," cried Joe, "hunting for her herbs; but she'll stop for us. Come on."

Lilian hung back.

"But I'm afraid," she shivered.

"Pooh!" laughed Joe. "Aunt Peggy wouldn't hurt a fly." Then he called: "Hello, Aunt Peggy! I've brought some friends of mine to see you. Won't you show us your cabin?"

"Mebbe so, mebbe," grunted the old woman, "if you'll be good." Her voice was stern, but her old eyes were twinkling, and after she had shown the cabin and its odd treasures she easily yielded to Joe's coaxing and seated herself to chant one of her curious old folklore songs which were the delight of the children, young and old, for miles around.

"'The Twelfth Day of Christmas,' please," begged Susie.

"All right," agreed the old woman; "and I'll sing

it as my mother sung it to me years ago, and as her mother sung it to her before that." And then she began, in a tremulous little singsong chant:

"'On the first day of Christmas my true love sent
to me a partridge and a pear tree.

"'On the second day of Christmas my true love sent
to me two turtledoves, and a partridge
and a pear tree.'"

On and on quavered the old voice, verse after verse, adding gift after gift. Faster and faster tumbled the words about the children's ears until the song ended in one long, delightful burst of fascinating jargon—the twelfth verse:

"'On the twelfth day of Christmas my true love sent
to me twelve lions roaring, eleven hounds a-howling,
ten bears a-baiting, nine lords a-leaping, eight
ladies dancing, seven swans a-swimming, six geese
a-laying, five gold rings, four French hens, three
curlew birds, two turtledoves, and a partridge and
a pear tree.'"

"Oh-h!" breathed the four children ecstatically, when the last word died into silence. "Now, another, please!"

Another and another did old Peggy sing; then Joe said they must start home. And all the way it seemed to Lilian as if she were keeping step to the swinging little rhythm of "three curlew birds, two turtledoves and a partridge and a pear tree."

Soon after breakfast on Monday morning Miss Haywood sought the janitor in the basement.

"I want to take a basket of things to some children over at the South End, and I shall need some one to help me. Can I get you to do it?" she asked.

"Sure!" said the man heartily.

Miss Haywood did not think it best to take Fred and Anabel with her, neither did she approve of allowing Mother Moll and Kitty to accept Anabel's invitation to dinner until something more was known about them; so she and the janitor went together. When she returned at noon, to Fred and Anabel, she found two eager questioners who wanted to know every detail of her visit.

"Yes, I saw them," she said, "and they'll come to-morrow to spend the day—the boys and all. You must be very good to them, chickabiddies, and give them just the nicest sort of good time. They are very poor and they hardly know the meaning of fun," she finished with a little catch in her voice as she thought of Mother Moll's poor little home.

Fred and Anabel did not think of much during the rest of the day but the coming visit from Mother Moll and her family. Even the long walk and the long ride which they took with their aunt in the afternoon failed to drive from their minds the plans for the next day.

Tuesday dawned fair and clear; and promptly at ten o'clock Mother Moll, Kitty, Winks and Blinks—the boys were never known by any other names—appeared at the Marston flat. Each one was proudly happy in a new suit. Miss Haywood had taken all four to the nearest department store the day before, and had fitted them out with new clothing from head to foot; and each one was wildly curious to know what this strange invitation to spend the day might bring forth.

At half past ten Miss Haywood and six bright-eyed boys and girls boarded the trolley car, and

started on the long hour's ride that was to take them to a large pleasure park some distance from the city.

"This is great!" cried Winks, when the park with its trees, flowers and stirring music was reached.

"Tiptop!" burst out Blinks.

"You see we don't have much trees and grass where we live," explained Mother Moll, half apologetically; "and, of course, we act kind of crazy when we do get where they are. You know there isn't anything that quite comes up to trees and grass! You don't have them where you live, either; do you?" she went on sympathetically.

"Why, yes we do, too," cried Anabel. "It's all trees and grass!"

Mother Moll looked puzzled.

"Why, I didn't see any," she ventured timidly, "only that little spot in the front and I don't call that trees and grass."

"Pooh! That!" retorted Anabel. "I shouldn't think you would; but we don't live there. We live in the country."

"Not the real country," cried Winks, "with fishing and swimming!"

"And barns and chickens?" cut in Blinks and Kitty.

"Well, I just think it's the real country," cried Fred triumphantly.

"You see they've been 'Fresh-airers,'" explained Mother Moll, "Kit and the boys—so they know. I couldn't go, because there was only room for three when they got around to us; but the doctor is going to fix it so I can go sometime."

"Oh, but you just ought to see our place!" exclaimed Fred.

"Perhaps they will, dears," interposed Aunt Ellen

smilingly. "Suppose we ask them to come up next summer for a visit. Would you like to?" she added, turning to Mother Moll and her family.

A jubilant chorus of "Tiptop!" "Great!" "I'm sure we would like it!" replied to her question; and for the next ten minutes even the park itself was forgotten in the delightful plans the six young people laid for that next summer's visit.

"We'll give you the nicest time you ever had!" finished Anabel, at last; then a queer look came into her face, and she glanced at Fred. Fred was not noticing.

"Fred," she whispered a minute later, pulling her brother aside, "we forgot—we aren't going to be home next summer!"

"What?" cried Fred; then his face fell. "Why, so—we—aren't!"

"Of course, we don't want to be, either," went on Anabel, tossing her head, but not meeting Fred's eyes; "only I'm sorry we said anything about their coming up. But then, probably they'll forget all about it. Anyhow, we can't say anything yet, even to Aunt Ellen, 'cause Lilian said to save it till the last."

Mother Moll, Kitty and the two boys showed no signs of forgetting it, however, and they did not seem to notice that after a while they had to do most of the talking themselves. But in time the merry-go-rounds and the wonderful animals in the zoo silenced even their tongues on the matter, and their attention was given to the enjoyment of the more immediate present.

At noon came luncheon. After that came the long ride back to Boston, and a supper all together in a pretty down-town café before taking Mother

Moll, Kitty and the boys to their home. And not until Anabel was dropping off to sleep that night did she suddenly remember again that she had invited two boys and two girls to Fletcherville next summer, when she herself expected to be miles away.

Tuesday had been a beautiful day in Fletcherville, and Ralph, Lilian, Joe and Susie had made the most of it. They had been particularly anxious to crowd the day as full as possible, for Joe announced in the morning that they were very unexpectedly going away the next day with their mother for a week at Grandmother Wheeler's over beyond Fletcherville.

When the Marstons awoke Wednesday morning they heard the rat-a-tat-tat of the rain on the roof.

"Oh, dear," groaned Ralph, "what did it have to rain to-day for?"

"But there's the attic," reminded Lilian; "you know we said when we came that we wished it would rain so we'd have to play there."

Ralph brightened; and immediately after breakfast he and Lilian scampered upstairs. For some time they ransacked boxes and barrels, and played charades; then they dropped listlessly down on an old settee and looked about them.

"Dear me," sighed Lilian after a long pause, "how I do wish I could see Nannie Gibson!" Nannie Gibson was her dearest friend in Boston.

"Don't see how you can—if you stay here," retorted Ralph; "so you might as well begin to get used to it."

Lilian frowned and moved restlessly in her seat. By and by she climbed on a trunk and looked out of the window.

"It's awfully wet," she announced after a time.

Ralph did not answer.

"'Tis kind of funny, isn't it?" sighed Lilian, after a time. "Oh, it's nice, and all that, of course; but 'tis funny."

"What's funny?" asked Ralph.

"The country. It's so quiet, you know. Now, listen! There isn't one single thing you can hear but the rain. At home, you know, there are people, and carriages, and cars, and the folks in the next flat and sometimes fire engines and bands."

Ralph looked up suspiciously.

"See here, Lilian Marston, are you backing out?" he demanded. "Are you backing out of wanting to stay exchanged right along?"

Lilian flushed a quick red.

"Of course, I'm not backing out, Ralph Marston," she retorted. "It doesn't do any harm just to compare things. Besides, how'd we know which we'd like the better if we didn't do it? Tell me that!"

"Humph!" grunted Fred; and Lilian said no more.

Later they got out their books and read. Still later they played flinch; and after hours and hours—each of which seemed almost a day in length—it was bedtime. And the last thing Lilian heard as she dropped off to sleep was the rat-a-tat-tat on the roof.

CHAPTER VII

ALL day Wednesday the Marston flat in Boston had been in semi-twilight. All day it had rained. When Thursday came, therefore, and brought no change in the lowering sky, Fred and Anabel were in despair.

"But, auntie, what can we do?" asked Anabel. "We read yesterday until our eyes ached, and we played checkers and dominoes until we hated the sight of them; and it seems as if we couldn't start in all over again!"

"But, children," remonstrated Aunt Ellen, "I never knew you to be so restless at home on a rainy day!"

"Oh, at home we are used to things, I suppose," said Fred, with a quick glance at his sister; "and we'd do things we're used to. Not but that it's nicer here," he added hurriedly, "only it's—different."

"Yes, indeed, of course it's a great deal nicer here," chimed in Anabel. "Here, Fred, quick. See if you can catch me before I get to the end of the hall!" And she turned and darted down the narrow passageway, dodging through an open door at the side just in time to slip out of Fred's reach.

It proved to be great sport—this game of indoor tag; and Fred and Anabel were soon laughing and screaming at the top of their voices. Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by, and the charm of tag did not abate. Out in the kitchen Aunt Ellen was thinking how glad she was that the children had found

something new to amuse them, when there came a sharp knock at the front hall door.

"If you please, ma'am," began an angry voice, as Miss Haywood opened the door, "my mistress says as how she's sorry to complain, but she just can't stand another minute of this racket. What with the hollering and the shouting and the dancing of the chandelier, she's 'most wild, and she's been expecting every minute that the plastering would come tumbling down on her head!"

"Oh, I am so—so sorry," stammered Miss Haywood in quick distress. "We are not used to living in a flat, and I never thought of the neighbors downstairs. Tell your mistress it shall be stopped at once."

"Er—thank you," muttered the woman slightly mollified, as she turned to go downstairs.

Back in the hall Miss Haywood faced an indignant boy and girl.

"Just as if a little game like that could hurt anybody!" stormed Anabel wrathfully. "Why, I never did see such fussy folks!"

"And there was that night in the air shaft," said Fred; "they wouldn't let us talk in there!"

"I know it," cried Anabel; "or walk on just common grass, or pick flowers that were growing right outdoors, either. I just hate their old fussy ways down here; so there!"

"Anabel, Anabel," remonstrated Miss Haywood gently. "You are angry now, dear, and you don't know what you are saying. You were noisy and it did jar their ceiling, I've no doubt. It was my fault. I ought to have thought, but you see we are not used to living in quite such close quarters with other people."

"I'm sure I'm glad we aren't," burst out Anabel. "Who wants to live all huddled with folks like this, anyhow? I'm sure I don't!" The next instant she had clapped her hand to her lips with a swift look at Fred as he ran back into the kitchen. She suddenly had remembered that this was exactly the way they were to live now that they had decided to accept Lilian's proposition to keep on with the exchange.

Thursday at the farmhouse in Fletcherville had been but repetition of the day before, so far as weather and weariness were concerned; but on Friday the sun rose clear, and was hailed with joy by all the family.

"It's queer," observed Ralph, "how much longer two rainy days are than a whole week of pleasant ones."

"I've noticed that myself," returned his father, with a smile. "And I'm glad this last day here is to be a fine one. You know that to-morrow we go home."

"Oh, dear, isn't it dreadful!" mourned Lilian, trying to look very downhearted. Under cover of the overhanging tablecloth she nudged her brother, which he understood to mean that he, too, was expected to join in the pretended lamentations.

"Yes, isn't it!" he echoed.

"Come, come, dears, this will never do in the world," protested Mrs. Marston. "I know it's nice here, and I don't blame you for not wanting to leave. We don't want to go ourselves! But you are forgetting the good times you have in Boston; and, besides, there are all your young mates—only think what a lot you will have to tell them!"

"And there's another thing, children," said Mr.

Marston. "I didn't tell you, for I wanted it to be a surprise; but there's to be a fine electrical parade in Boston next Monday, and I'd planned that we'd all go to see it."

"And I," added Mrs. Marston, turning to Lilian, "have invited Nannie Gibson to come in from Newton and go with us, then she can spend the night with you. You see, I arranged this little surprise to make it easier for you to leave all the good times here."

"Oh-h," replied Lilian, in a queer, little, shaky voice. "T-thank you." Ralph did not speak.

"Why, the poor little things looked even more miserable than before," said Mrs. Marston to her husband, as soon as Ralph and Lilian had left the room. "It's too bad they hate to go so."

Out in the yard Ralph and Lilian walked slowly to the old settee under the maple tree.

"They—they'll be surprised when we tell them we've fixed it to exchange right along; won't they?" began Lilian, talking very fast so as to hide the shake in her voice. "And they'll be pleased, too."

"Yes," said Ralph. He hesitated a minute, then asked, "When are you going to—tell them?"

"Why, I thought not until to-night," returned Lilian anxiously. "I thought I'd save the surprise until the last minute—same as I do the frosting on cake, you know. And, Ralph, won't it be fun?"

"Yes," said Ralph, "won't it?" A listener might have thought the enthusiasm a little forced. Even Lilian threw a quick look at his face.

Ralph and Lilian tried to be very jolly that morning, but there did not seem to be anything that they really wanted to do. They spent most of the time, indeed, under the maple tree talking of Boston and

of the parade which they were not going to see. After a time they went down to the field where Jim was at work, but even there it wasn't very interesting. From field to pasture, and from pasture to woodland they trudged, listlessly, aimlessly, not seeming to care where they went, until almost noon. Then they turned their steps toward the farmhouse for dinner.

The afternoon passed much as had the forenoon. By four o'clock they had drifted to the old stone wall by the road.

"It was here we first saw Sue and Joe; wasn't it?" said Lilian wistfully.

"Yes, and I'd like to see them now," retorted Ralph.

"So would I," sighed Lilian, looking to the right and to the left where the road stretched in both directions, white, hot and dusty. There was not a living thing in sight. "Dear me, I should like to see somebody or something besides just trees and grass and road!" she cried.

Ralph clicked his heels together against the wall. He sent a sidelong glance at his sister, but he said nothing.

Supper was a very quiet meal that night, though Mr. and Mrs. Marston did their best to make it as cheerful as possible. When it was over Lilian ran upstairs for a handkerchief, but almost immediately she came clattering down again.

"Ralph," she called excitedly, "where are you? Here, come quick, come out into the apple tree. I want to speak to you!"

"Why, Lilian Marston, what in the world is it?" demanded Ralph, as he climbed to his sister's side. "I haven't seen you look so pleased for a week!"

Lilian sobered instantly.

"You are very much mistaken, Ralph," she said, with some dignity. "I am not pleased at all." And Lilian really thought she was telling the truth. "I am excited; that is all. Of course I am very much disappointed—very much," she repeated with emphasis.

"What about?"

"The exchange. We can't tell them. We can't tell them at all, Ralph," she said impressively.

"Why, Lilian Marston, what do you mean? Why not?" demanded Ralph.

"Because the trunks are all packed. I saw them upstairs a minute ago, and I never thought of the trunks before, Ralph. We ought to have told them sooner, of course, but we can't make them have all that work now for nothing, so we'll have to go to-morrow, after all!" And Lilian settled back against the tree very complacently indeed for one who was so sadly disappointed.

"But, how—how can we when it's all fixed?" stammered Ralph, who was slightly dazed in the face of so tremendous and sudden a change in his whole future life.

"But it wasn't fixed. We hadn't told them yet."

"But there's Fred and Anabel—you told them."

Lilian frowned.

"Yes, I know," she paused thoughtfully. "Well, anyhow," she went on with renewed assurance, "they haven't said anything to us yet, so maybe they haven't told their aunt, either. We'll see how things come out at the junction."

"But what if they don't meet us? What if they don't start to come home at all?"

For a moment Lilian looked puzzled; then she tossed her head.

"Why, if they aren't there we'll keep right on to Boston, of course, and fix it up down there. Dear me, if I didn't forget my handkerchief, after all!" she broke off suddenly. "I'll have to go in after it." And she began to pick her way down the tree.

Ralph sat looking after her. Little by little his thoughts were coming into something like order. Little by little he was beginning to understand.

"I don't believe she wanted to stay herself!" he cried suddenly, with a thump of his clinched fist on his knee. "And—and I don't believe I do, either."

It had cleared off very warm after the rain that Thursday afternoon in Boston; and when Anabel went into her tiny little room to go to bed the place was as warm as an oven.

All night she tossed about on the hot little bed with only fitful snatches of sleep; and when morning came she was even more tired than when she went to bed.

"Why, I never did see such a feeling morning! What does ail it?" she cried.

"I'm afraid Kitty and the rest have seen a good many such mornings, Anabel," said Aunt Ellen. "Just think what it will be to them to have that nice long visit with us next summer! It is a bad feeling morning, but you'll be all right, dear, just as soon as we get back to the fresh, country air."

Anabel said nothing, but Fred, who was watching, saw that she put her muffin down untasted, and that before long she asked to be excused from the table.

"Well, chickabiddies, what shall we do with our-

selves to-day—this last day?" asked Aunt Ellen a little later.

Fred coughed, and Anabel pulled his sleeve.

"Sh-h!" she whispered. "We don't want to tell her yet. You know Lilian said not to do it until the last minute. And of course Aunt Ellen doesn't know it isn't our last day!"

"How would it do to take a run down the harbor to one of the beaches?" went on Aunt Ellen. "That ought to be cool."

"Just lovely!" exclaimed Anabel. "Besides, we really ought to go somewhere. If we stayed here, you know, we might breathe too loud and disturb the people downstairs!" she finished scornfully.

"Anabel, my dear!" remonstrated Aunt Ellen; but Fred was sure he caught the gleam of a far-away twinkle in his aunt's eye.

At nine o'clock when the Haywoods left the Marston flat, the sun beat down upon the pavements and heated them so hot that they seemed to scorch and shrivel one's feet at every step. Even the breeze on the trolley car was like a blast from a furnace. It promised to be cooler on the boat, however, and they all sighed with relief when that was reached.

And what a day it was to everyone but Anabel! Anabel alone did not seem quite happy. To tell the truth, nothing seemed to please Anabel that day. The sun on the water hurt her eyes, and she declared that there was not "a mite of breeze on the whole boat." At the beach the waves were "such little bits of things!" for the tide was going out; and she said it was too warm to walk about. Yet, if questioned, Anabel insisted that she was having "a perfectly lovely time," and she seemed to get very angry if anyone doubted it.

They took an early boat home, Aunt Ellen saying that she had packing to do; and at the words Fred nudged Anabel.

"Tell her, tell her! Why don't you tell her?" he whispered.

Anabel frowned and shook her head.

All the way to the Marston flat Anabel scarcely spoke, and Aunt Ellen, thinking that her niece was grieving over the good times so soon to end, tried to arouse her interest in the things at home—Flossie and the kittens, the rosebush, Joe, Susie and all the others who would be so interested to hear about the wonderful visit. But the longer she talked the more dismal grew Anabel's face; so that in time Aunt Ellen gave it up in despair.

"Anabel, what in the world ails you?" demanded Fred, an hour later, coming upon his sister crying in the parlor window seat.

"That's exactly what I want to know myself," sobbed Anabel. "What does ail me?"

"Don't you know?" he asked, as he dropped down to his sister's side. The two had the parlor to themselves. Aunt Ellen was getting supper in the kitchen.

"Look here!" cried Anabel, with sudden impatience. "Here I ought to be feeling perfectly happy, 'cause Lilian says we can exchange right along and live here always; and instead of that, there isn't a single thing that looks good to me. I'm so hot, and I'm so tired of streets and houses as far as you can see, and I don't see what such a lot of folks are for, anyway—folks that you don't know, not a single one of them, and that scold if you so much as laugh out loud—and I was so happy at first!"

Fred laughed again. This time he patted Anabel's

head. He felt suddenly very old and wise—much more than just two years older than this sobbing little girl at his side. He knew so well what was the trouble.

"My dear, it's just plain United States homesickness," he announced, a bit airily. "It was all very well here until you thought you were going to stay here always and never see home again, then it became quite a different matter. But don't fret, dear. We won't stay. I don't want to, either," he confessed.

"But there's Lilian and Ralph—you know they wanted to exchange," wailed Anabel.

"Pooh! What if they do?" rejoined Fred. "We never said we'd exchange right along, so they can't hold us to any promises."

"But if Lilian has told her folks they won't come to the junction to meet us at all," went on Anabel, still unconvinced. "And then what could we do?"

"Go straight to Fletcherville. The farmhouse is big enough to hold us all. We'll let them stay, too, if they want. Who cares?"

"Splendid!" cried Anabel, springing to her feet. "Then we'll go just as we'd planned at first, and we'll have Kitty and Mother Moll and the boys up next summer, and we won't live in any horrid, hot old city; will we? Oh, I'm so glad!"

Just eighteen hours later two trains rumbled out of a certain Massachusetts junction, carrying the three Haywoods to Fletcherville, and the four Marstons to Boston.

During the brief ten minutes of waiting at the junction, the four excited children and their elders had all talked together, exclaiming, questioning and

recounting experiences—but not once had there been so much as a hint of a longer exchange of homes.

“Well, anyhow,” confided Lilian to Ralph, as their train gathered speed, “Fletcherville is perfectly glorious for a vacation, and I’ve had just the nicest kind of time; but I’d lots rather live in Boston!”

Yet at that very moment a certain other little girl was saying:

“Wasn’t it lovely, Fred, and didn’t we have a good time? But, of course, when it comes to real, right-down living, we’d rather have Fletcherville and the farmhouse every time!”

IV: THE TWINS' JOURNEY

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CHAPTER I

IT was a busy time for everybody. Not often does a whole town try to get a ten-year-old boy and a ten-year-old girl ready to go away to school; but that is exactly what Pikesville was trying to do. To be sure, Pikesville was not very large. It had only a score of houses nestled in the hollow of the mountain side; but all Pikesville people were out to-day, and many of them were gathered in Mrs. Golding's cottage, where, upstairs in the two little rooms under the eaves, the twins were hurrying into their clothes.

Downstairs, Mrs. Golding stood before an open suit case with a dozen neighbors around her.

"You see, there isn't much, after all, that they can take, except the presents," Mrs. Golding was saying with a thoughtful frown. "Of course they wear their best, and that's all they have that's really decent."

"Of course," agreed two or three voices.

"It certainly is," spoke up Mrs. Griggs, who was standing near the door. "I reckon I know," she added laughingly, "for I mended them all up just before they came here last month."

"And their stockings—have they a whole pair?" demanded a plump little woman near the window.

"Oh, yes, I bought stockings, and a pair each for a

change," declared Mrs. Golding. "There are a few other things, too, in the way of underclothing that will do until they get new; but, of course, for outside things——" she stopped and looked at the suit case with anxious eyes.

"Nonsense! Don't you worry," comforted Mrs. Griggs. "I reckon the aunt would rather buy things to suit herself when they get to Boston."

"Yes, of course, of course," murmured Mrs. Golding. "And now I'll just pack these," she finished, beginning to tuck away in the suit case the numerous little packages that lay on the table near her. She named each one as she came to it.

"Now here are your peppermints, Mrs. Griggs, and your husband's knife; Molly's pink hair ribbon, and Mrs. Smith's blue one; the puzzle Old Joe brought, and the dominoes from Uncle Simon and ——" And so on and on she worked and talked, while upstairs the twins, to whom all these presents had been brought, laced their shoes and combed their hair in a rush of hurry and excitement.

It was not strange, after all, that the whole of Pikesville should be getting the twins ready for school, for, for the last six years, the whole of Pikesville had helped to bring them up.

Carrie and Carl Abbott were four years old when their mother's death, very soon after their father's, left them quite alone in the world. Since then the neighbors had taken turns giving them a home. There had been an aunt in the East, and she had been written to immediately after the sudden death of the mother; but the aunt had written back that she had a sick father and two small children to care for, and that she could not possibly go West to get the twins. She said that later, when Carl and Carrie

were older, they might be sent to her; but she could not take them then.

This had been six years before, and ever since then the twins had "lived around" at the homes in Pikesville; and Pikesville—rough, but kind-hearted—had done its best for them.

Now, however, the people thought it was time for a change; not that they were unwilling to take care of the twins longer, but that they thought Carl and Carrie should have the advantages of the East and good schools.

"And they ought to have a good home, too—one that doesn't change every few minutes," Mrs. Briggs had declared one day, when they were talking the matter over. "Their mother came from the East, and I'm sure she'd want them brought up and educated there among her own people; and I, for one, move that we write to their aunt and tell her the twins are coming. She said to send them when they were older, you know."

"Yes, I know she did," said Mrs. Golding, "and I think we'd better write her at once, too. We'll ask Mr. Smith to look up all about the trains, and the best one for them to take. Then we'll set the day and tell the aunt, leaving plenty of time for her to answer, if she wants any different time set. If we don't hear anything, then we'll tell her we'll send them along as planned. We shall miss the little things, of course. They're nice children; but I think they ought to be with their own people now, if ever."

"Indeed they should," agreed Mrs. Smith a little soberly. "In fact, I don't see how we can do anything but send them. I don't think we ought to keep them here another month when we can do so little for them!"

So the letter had been written, and as no reply had been received to change their plans, Carl and Carrie were now to start for Boston. In Mr. Smith's sleigh they were to make the trip down the mountain to the big town thirty miles away. There they were to board a train for the long journey to Boston, alone. Is it any wonder, then, that in the little rooms up under the eaves at Mrs. Golding's they were so excited they scarcely knew what they were about? They were nearly dressed now, however, and through the thin partition were calling back and forth to each other.

"Say, Carrie, how nearly ready are you?" asked Carl, after a long silence. It was usually Carl who spoke first.

"Oh, almost ready, if only my hair—would—fix—right!" jerked Carrie.

"Ho! You sound as if you were trying to comb it with your tongue," giggled the boy. Then he added airily, "I'm glad I'm not a girl with hair that"—he stopped rather suddenly, and let his voice trail into silence. To tell the truth, Carl at that moment was trying to make one particular lock of his own hair stay flat down with its neighbors.

"Oh!" exclaimed Carrie from her room a moment later. "O fear!"

"What's the matter? Can't you fix it? Why don't you cut it off?" Judging by his voice, Carl's own hair was obedient now. "Oh, say, you know," he went on a little importantly, "you'd better not own up that you can't fix it. You know if we couldn't learn to dress all by ourselves, we weren't to go East."

"Yes, yes, I know; and I have fixed it," almost

moaned Carrie. "It isn't my hair any longer; it's my shoe string. I've broken it!"

"Tie it."

"Carl Abbott!" answered a shocked voice. "As if I could go to Boston with a tied shoe string! My! What would Aunt Harriet say? I've got to find a new one!"

For another long minute there was silence; then Carl spoke again.

"Find one?"

"Yes."

"Say, Carrie, won't it be great—just great?"

"Yes; but, Carl, I can't make it seem real—not really real, can you?"

"I reckon you'll think it's real, all right when we get started and are 'way off from here. You know we don't get there till Friday."

Something like a choking little cry came from the girl's room.

"Say, Carl, that's the trouble—the going away. I hate to do it. I want to be East—and here, too."

"Humph! Well, I reckon you'd have a little trouble trying to do that," called a voice whose cheerfulness was a little forced.

"I know; but—Carl, they've been so good to us!"

"They certainly have."

"Just think of all those things they brought us—the knife and the games and the candy and the hair ribbons, besides that lovely great box of luncheon, just full of all the things we like best. And they're all waiting downstairs now to see us off. I peeked through the window. Lots of them came in, but those that didn't are all hanging around outdoors. And, O Carl, I can hear bells. Mr. Smith must have

come. Carl, I—I don't believe I want to go, after all."

"Children, children, aren't you ready?" called Mrs. Golding's voice at the foot of the stairs. "Dear, dear! If this is the length of time it takes you to dress yourselves, how do you expect to get time to do anything else?" And, pantingly, Mrs. Golding arrived at the top of the stairs ready to look over her charges carefully to make sure they were quite prepared to start on the long journey before them.

It is safe to say that in Pikesville never before had there been such a scene as when the twins said good-by that twenty-fourth of December. Even the men's voices grew husky at times, and the women could not hide the fact that they were crying. At the same time, everybody talked very loud and very fast, and everybody laughed a good deal, for nobody wanted Carl and Carrie to cry.

"Now here's the luncheon, Carrie; you can carry that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Golding, hurriedly thrusting the big box into the sleigh, and tucking it under the robes at Carrie's feet.

"And I'll carry the suit case," cried Carl.

"Yes; and, children, write to us just as soon as you get there," cautioned Mrs. Golding. "I've put in a stamped envelope and some paper and a pencil. We shall want to hear right away. Mr. Smith will speak to the conductor, and he'll look out for you. Don't worry," she called cheerfully as the sleigh started and she caught a glimpse of Carrie's tear-dimmed eyes.

Carl called back a very lusty good-by with what he meant to be a wild-Indian war whoop, and Carrie waved her mittened hand very gayly; but when they turned face forward again, they would not meet each

other's eyes, and for the first few miles of their journey Mr. Smith carried two very silent passengers, indeed.

Back in the town the men and women still lingered by the door to talk it over.

"Well, it's all right and I'm glad they are gone," declared Old Uncle Simon. "But we shall miss those children a heap."

"I reckon we shall," almost sobbed Mrs. Golding; "but that aunt can't say we haven't done well by them, and given them just the best send-off we could—raising all that money for the tickets, and telling Jim Smith to get good seats on the car, the kind they make up nights into little beds. She can't say we haven't done just as well as their own mother would have done!"

"No, and as she didn't write us to change the plans any, she must have thought everything was exactly right. So she'll expect them, and be there to meet them," concluded Mrs. Griggs.

It was just here, however, that Mrs. Griggs was mistaken, for the aunt had not received any letter at all, and so was not expecting the children. That letter, in ample time for reply, had been given to an old man to mail. But the old man's hand was not sure, and after a time the letter had slipped from his bundle of letters and papers to the ground. It lay now by the roadside far down the mountain under a foot of snow.

So the woman to whom it was addressed, thousands of miles to the east, could not know, of course, that traveling toward her now were a ten-year-old boy and a ten-year-old girl, Carl and Carrie Abbott, who were even at that moment talking of what they would say to Aunt Harriet.

Carl and Carrie Abbott were not at all alike, even though they were twins. Carl had blue eyes and fair hair, while Carrie had brown hair, and rather wistful, dark eyes. Carl was half an inch taller than Carrie, and it was strange how important that half inch became—sometimes. Carl had a quick way of speaking that gave him usually the first word; and as he always spoke before he thought, he had to have the last word, too, frequently, so as to correct what he had said first.

Carl was very fond of his sister, and, in spite of an occasional thoughtlessness, prided himself on the good care he took of her. Carrie, on her part, was very fond of her brother, and quite prided himself on the good care she took of him.

Carrie was slower of speech than Carl was, but that did not mean that she talked less. In Pikesville they thought Carrie talked a great deal. Neither of the twins talked much, however, on the trip down the mountain till the valley was reached. Then, with their mountain home miles behind them, they began to question Mr. Smith concerning their journey.

CHAPTER II

THERE isn't very much that I can tell you, and that's a fact," said Mr. Smith regretfully, in answer to the questions of Carl and Carrie on their way to the train. "You see, I never traveled very far East. I can tell you only about the first of it; the rest you'll have to find out for yourselves."

"Well, then, what do we do first?" asked Carl.

"Well, in about an hour, we'll stop at Rumford's and get a first-rate dinner," smiled the man, clucking to his horse, as if already the smell of the dinner had reached his nostrils. "Then we'll keep pegging right along until we get to the place where you'll take the train. We could have made a train all right by going to the Falls, and saved a dozen miles or so besides; but 'twouldn't have been the same train, and you'd have had to change to this one in the end, which would have been harder for you. I'd rather put you on the train myself, then I can speak to the conductor, and arrange everything for you. The train is one of the big ones, and you'll go straight through to Chicago, where you'll change for another one that will take you clear to Boston. We don't take the train until evening, and we'll have plenty of time to get a good supper before it comes."

"Supper!" demurred Carl, in a disappointed voice, "Aren't we ever going to eat our luncheon? You know what a big box we have and what a lot of good things we have in it!"

Mr. Smith smiled.

"Oh, you don't need to worry about that," he responded. "There will be lots of time for that! Why, children, I don't believe you realize it yet. This is Monday. You aren't going to get to Boston till Friday. You'll have plenty of use for that luncheon; and if there isn't enough there, you can buy things to eat on the train."

"Right on the cars, while they are going?" cried Carl.

"Sure! That's what they tell me—though I'm not saying I ever did it, you know."

"But how can they cook in a car?" cried Carrie. "Why, it's full of nothing but seats. I've seen the cars down at the Falls, two times, but I never saw anybody cook in them."

Mr. Smith shook his head.

"You'll have to ask somebody besides me for that, Carrie," he answered; "but I suspect you'll find out soon enough for yourself. And you'll find out other things, too. You know you sleep on the cars. Had you thought of that?"

"Sleep! I wonder if you think I'm going to sleep?" scorned Carl. "I'm going to look out of the window every minute. I don't want to miss seeing a thing."

"But, Carl, it's night there just the same as it is at home," remonstrated Mr. Smith. "You can't see things at night."

"What? Oh!" laughed Carl, a little sheepishly. "Well, I reckon I forgot 'twould be dark. But, anyhow, I'll look while I can see."

"You'll want to stop looking all right when night comes," asserted Mr. Smith. "Besides, you're forgetting about the beds. Maybe you didn't know, but Pikesville made up its mind that you two should

have just the best that was going; so we all clubbed together and raised money enough to get one of those sections, as they call it, in a sleeper."

"What's a sleeper?" asked Carrie.

"Pooh! as if everybody didn't know what a sleeper is," joked Carl good-naturedly. Carl had been intently studying some small tracks in the snow, and had not heard all that Mr. Smith had said. "A sleeper is somebody who is asleep, of course."

Carrie frowned in puzzled wonder. To her this definition did not help at all.

Mr. Smith chuckled. "Well, this doesn't happen to be that kind of sleeper," he said quite gravely. "I meant a railroad sleeper."

"Oh, that kind," retorted Carl, uptilting his chin a little. Carl never did like to own up he had made a mistake. "Oh, you mean those long pieces of wood under the railroad track? Bill Trindle told me what those were."

This time Mr. Smith laughed outright.

"Wrong again, Carl!" he teased. "And now you'd better give up, for I know you never saw the kind of sleeper I mean, and I never did, either, but once—and then I didn't ride in it." It's a car where folks ride, sitting up daytimes and laying down nights."

"Why, Mr. Smith—how?" cried both Carl and Carrie in a breath.

"They make up the beds in the seats."

"Real beds?"

"Sure! That's what they say."

"I should think folks would roll off," cried Carl; "they're so narrow."

"And they aren't half long enough to lie down on—unless you're even shorter than I am," chimed in Carrie.

"Well, I don't know, I don't know," answered Mr. Smith cheerily. "You'll find out soon enough for yourselves. Getting hungry? We're almost at Rumford's."

They were getting hungry, and they showed it a little later when the steaming hot dinner was placed before them. After that, once on the way again, they began to talk more of the wonderful journey they were to take, and of the strange things they were to see on the way. They spoke of Aunt Harriet, too, and wondered what she would be like, and what Boston would be like.

"Of course Aunt Harriet wants us," said Carrie a little anxiously, after a time, "or she'd have written and said for us not to come now."

"Of course," agreed Mr. Smith a little wistfully. "She'd better want you! We're going to miss you two chicks a heap, back in Pikesville."

"I reckon you won't miss us any more than we shall miss you," declared Carl stoutly.

"No, indeed," almost choked Carrie.

For some time neither of the twins had anything to say, but it was not very long, after all, before they were merrily chattering again. They chattered, indeed, so fast and so constantly, that at last Mr. Smith quite groaned aloud.

"My, my!" he exclaimed, with a funny sidelong glance at each of them, "are you going to keep it up like this all the way to Boston?"

"Of course we aren't," declared Carl. "I tell you we aren't going to talk at all on the cars. We're going to look out of the windows all the time—that is, except when we sleep," he added, bethinking himself.

"Talk at all!" muttered Mr. Smith under his

breath; then suddenly he laughed as if he thought something was very funny indeed. But all he said was: "Humph! Maybe you won't talk; but I'd just like to meet some of those folks you'll ride with, and see what they say, after you've reached Boston."

At five o'clock the biggest town that the twins had ever seen was reached, and very eagerly Carl and Carrie looked about them. Later came a good, hot supper; then, almost before they realized what had happened, the huge engine and the long train had thundered into the station, and Mr. Smith was hurrying them aboard.

It was all very confusing then, to the twins. They knew that Mr. Smith said something very earnestly to a big man in a blue suit and a blue cap, also to a black man who smiled and nodded his head many times, and who bowed very low, showed all his teeth, and said: "Yes, sah, thank you, sah! I'll see they're all right, sah!" when Mr. Smith put some money in his hand. Then Mr. Smith turned to them, and tried to say something; but a bell rang, and men shouted outside, and there was time for only a very hurried good-by before Carl and Carrie found themselves alone on a wide, high-backed seat opposite another wide, high-backed seat, whereupon rested their suit case and the big box of luncheon. The next instant the train started, and the journey had begun.

"Carrie, look! There's Mr. Smith waving!" cried Carl. "Wave back—quick!"

"I'm g-going to," answered Carrie a little chokingly. Her handkerchief was already in her hand—for another purpose—but she hoped Carl would think she got it out just to wave with him. And

she did wave until Mr. Smith was quite out of sight. The next moment she turned, winking her eyes very fast as she asked a little quaveringly, "Carl, have we everything—every single thing?"

"'Course we have, but I reckon we couldn't help it now if we hadn't," he retorted. Carl, too, was winking his eyes rather fast, and opening them very wide after every wink; but his voice, as he spoke, was determinedly cheerful.

"The tickets, all of them?" questioned Carrie.

"Sure! They're in the envelope inside my very safest pocket, where Mr. Smith said to keep them. And the money's there, too, in my purse, except the half you've got. You know we each have two dollars. I told Mr. Smith I thought I ought to have it all to take care of, as I was bigger than you, but he said, 'No.' Now, Carrie, don't you lose that money. You know you're a girl, and girls are always losing things. They don't have so many good pockets as boys do."

Carrie sniffed a little mischievously. Her eyes were not teary now. She was beginning to feel the excitement of the occasion.

"Don't you worry, little boy. When you lose your money, I'll have some of mine to give you," she retorted, calling him by the name she always used to tease him with when he spoke not quite respectfully of girls and their ways.

"Ho!" bristled Carl, lifting his chin a little higher. "You see!"

"Yes, I'll see," nodded Carrie still mischievously. Then, with Carl, she began to look about them curiously. Their seat was in the middle of the car. Across the aisle sat a large, red-faced man reading a newspaper. He did not look very pleasant, de-

cided Carrie. The backs of the seats were too high for them to see many of their neighbors in the car, but by peering around the end of their seat, they did discover a very beautiful lady with big, sad eyes, sitting all alone in one seat, and two young men playing checkers in another.

The big, blue-coated man came in after a time, spoke to them kindly, and asked to see their tickets. He tore off something, punched two little round holes in something else, and tucked the whole back in the envelope. Later, another blue-coated man came. He, too, smiled at them kindly, and asked to see the tickets. He said something about "Section" and "Chicago," and he, also took strange liberties with some of those precious tickets. But in a moment he, too, handed them back; and Carl breathed again.

The black man, with the very white teeth, seemed to be everywhere, running about with cushions and pillows and glasses of water. Twice Carl heard him called "porter," so when he came up at last and asked Carl if there was anything he wanted, Carl smiled very politely, and said, "No, thank you, Mr. Porter," which seemed to please the black man very much, for he showed all his teeth in a very wide smile.

Carl was not talking very much now, neither was Carrie. Their eyes felt heavy, and their heads still heavier. The lights winked and blinked strangely, and the rumble of the wheels sounded far away in their ears.

"I wonder when it's bedtime on the cars," murmured Carrie, lifting her head with a little jerk. The next moment the black man came toward them.

"I s'pect maybe you two are sleepy," he began,

with his wide smile. "Just you sit over there while I fix you up," he added, pointing to an empty seat a little way down the car.

But if Carl and Carrie had been sleepy before, they were certainly not so any longer, for with excited, fascinated eyes they watched the black man turn their section into two of the strangest beds they had even seen. From a queer shelf let down from the top, he took blankets, pillows, curtains, and among other things, little sliding panels of wood. From somewhere he brought pillow cases and sheets. And when the whole thing was done, the seats were one little bed all complete, and the shelf was another, with a wooden partition at top and bottom, and a long, thick curtain in front.

"Now when you're ready, it's all ready for you," smiled the porter. "We'll put the young gentleman at the top."

"Young gentleman!" Carl seemed to grow a head taller in a minute.

"Oh, yes, I'll take the top," he answered carelessly.

Carl and Carrie were a good while getting ready for bed that night. Carrie bumped her head every five minutes on the "roof," as she called the shelf over her head; and everything she took off she lost right away, and had to feel around in the dim light to hunt for it. At last she discovered the little hammock hanging across the window, which proved to be a very safe place for her hair ribbon, her collar, her tie and any other little thing that she wanted to tuck away.

"Upstairs," as he called it, Carl was so occupied in poking his head out between the curtains to see

what was going on in the car, that he did not make much headway undressing.

At last, however, Carl and Carrie called themselves ready for bed, said their usual good-night prayers and tucked themselves in between the sheets; but neither of them was sleepy now. It was all too strange. The car, too, was full of noise and confusion. Other berths were being made up, and other people were getting ready for bed.

Wide-eyed and excited, Carl in the upper berth, and Carrie in the lower, lay still and thought. Perhaps they were a little lonesome; perhaps they were a little frightened; perhaps they were a little homesick. At all events, suddenly Carrie became conscious of a hand and arm thrust down from the upper berth on the inside of the curtain; then a hoarse whisper demanded, "Carrie, are you awake?"

Carrie reached up and patted the hand. "O Carl! Yes! Are you?"

A half-stifled giggle floated downward.

"Oh, no! I'm talking in my sleep, I am!"

It was Carrie's turn to giggle. She was tired, excited, and a little nervous, and was quite ready either to laugh or cry. Then Carl spoke again. He did not whisper this time.

"Say, Carrie, isn't this great?"

"Splendid!"

"I like going to Boston."

"So—so do I, only I—I would like to see the folks back home—just a minute; wouldn't you?"

"Course I would; but then, we're going to somebody, you know—Aunt Harriet. Say, Carrie, how do you think she looks?"

"I don't know."

"I know how I hope she'll look."

"How?"

"I hope she'll be little and jolly and lively, like Mrs. Snow," declared Carl.

"Oh, I don't," almost choked Carrie. "I hope she'll be big and round, and have nice shoulders to cry on."

"Pooh! Who wants to cry?" retorted Carl valiantly; but his voice shook a little. Carrie's words had exactly described Mrs. Golding, and Carl was very fond of Mrs. Golding.

For a long minute there was silence, then Carrie asked a little huskily:

"Carl, did you think? To-morrow will be Christmas. 'Twill be kind of lonesome; won't it?—just us two—alone!"

"Ho! We'll get along all right. I'm just longing for it to come daylight, so I can look out. Say, where do you suppose we are?"

Both the children were talking very loudly now. They seemed to have forgotten that there was anybody else in the car. For another five minutes they called gleefully back and forth; then Carl suddenly gave a chuckling laugh.

"O Carrie, listen! I've thought of something so funny. We're in a sleeper, and we're running over a lot of other sleepers, and just as soon as we get asleep we'll be sleepers ourselves!"

Carrie began to laugh, but almost instantly she stopped. From across the aisle had come a very cross man's voice. The train had stopped at a station, and his words rang out distressingly loud and clear.

"Well, maybe the rest of us would like to be sleepers, too, if you'd give us half a chance! Sup-

pose you two chatterboxes hush up awhile, and let us try!—eh?”

Neither Carl nor Carrie answered. They were too frightened to speak. From down the aisle in the direction of the two young men who had been playing checkers came a half-stifled chuckle; otherwise there was silence.

Carl waited a minute, then quietly he flung down his hand again and wriggled his fingers. Carrie caught them, and gave them two expressive squeezes. Then, resolutely, the two children settled themselves, and tried to go to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THOROUGHLY tired out from the experiences of the day before, Carl and Carrie awoke very late that Christmas morning. It was some time before they managed to dress themselves enough to finish their toilets in the little rooms at the ends of the car. And it was still longer before they were ready to open the luncheon box and eat their breakfast in their section, which the porter had again turned into seats. But when, at last, they were ready, how hungry they were, and how good everything tasted!

After breakfast they began to look about them, and to talk together; but they talked very quietly, and with frequent glances toward the big, red-faced man across the aisle. They were very sure that the voice the night before had come from him, and they told each other in whispers that he certainly looked cross enough, scowling over his magazine, and that they did not like him at all.

One thing the twins had found very disappointing. It had begun to snow the night before, just as they reached the big town where they were to take the train; and now when they eagerly looked out of the window, the first thing that Christmas morning, they found it still snowing. There was not one thing to be seen but whirling, driving flakes that hid everything from sight.

"And we can't see one thing," mourned Carl.

"Never mind; there are heaps to see, inside,"

Carrie soothed him. "Besides, we have the puzzle and the dominoes, and those two storybooks, you know."

Carl frowned.

"I can do all those things on land. I mean, I can do them when I'm home, sitting still. Now I'm traveling, and I want to see things, and there isn't a thing to see but snow, snow. So, there!" It was not often that Carl spoke quite so impatiently; and even now, as he snapped out the last word, he smiled shamefacedly.

"But there are things to see inside," argued Carrie earnestly. "Come, let's play we're in a strange country, and that we're going exploring. You go north, and I'll go south; I mean, you go to one end of the car, and I'll go to the other. We'll look just on one side, then we'll come back and tell what we've discovered. Next we'll explore east and west. Of course we'll have to go to the ends of the car just the same, only we'll take opposite sides that time. See?"

"Y-yes," consented Carl, a little grudgingly; and he got up and started toward the rear of the car, but not before he had given one lingering glance out of the window.

Two minutes later the twins were back in their seats.

"Well?" demanded Carrie.

"Oh, go on. You tell first."

"All right, then I'll begin." Carrie's eyes sparkled. Carrie loved to tell stories, and to imagine things. She dropped her voice and spoke in an impressive manner.

"To the north I found strange and wonderful things. First a narrow passage that led on and on

to a glass door. I looked through the door, but did not go in. I saw a queer little room with more doors, and shining railings; but the floor there teetered up and down—er—er—like anything," she finished lamely.

"Pooh!" scoffed Carl airily. "That's only where it leads into the next car." But Carrie paid no attention to this remark.

"On the way back," she resumed, with her old impressiveness, "I explored the tribes that live there. I found a woman with sorry eyes, holding a book, but looking out of the window at the snow. Next to her I found a man asleep. Next to him another woman who had a baby that was crying. Next, there was—was—an uninhabited region; a wild desert of seats with nobody in them. Now, what did you discover?" she asked in her ordinary voice.

Carl hitched in his seat. Carl never imagined things.

"Nothing, only two men playing checkers, and two women talking, and an old lady taking a nap," he answered, with a shrug.

"Good! Now we'll go to the east and the west," cried Carrie, springing to her feet. "I think it's going to be awfully interesting there," she finished as she danced into the aisle.

"Look-a-here," growled an angry voice; and Carrie turned to find the red-faced man scowling at her over his magazine. "Can't you two little jumping-jacks sit still a minute? What do you think this car is, anyway—a playground built specially for you?"

Carrie sat down. So did Carl. The man, seeing all the light flee from their faces, felt, perhaps, a little ashamed of his brusqueness.

"I'm sure I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings," he said then a little less crossly. "But, you see, there are other people in the car besides yourselves, and you seem to be forgetting it; that's all." And he turned back to his magazine.

Across the aisle Carl and Carrie sat very still for some time. Carl looked a little angry, and Carrie, as if she wanted to cry. Later, Carrie got out the dominoes, and very quietly they began to play.

Toward noon a round-faced boy came through the car with books. Later he appeared with a basket of assorted chocolates and wafers. It was then that Carl lifted his head with sudden determination.

"Carrie," he whispered, throwing a sidelong glance toward the red-faced man across the aisle. "I'm going to buy some candy. You know they said we could spend a little of our money."

"But we've got candy," demurred Carrie.

"We haven't any chocolates, and I want chocolates."

"I know, but they said we'd better save our money to buy something to eat if our luncheon box shouldn't last till we got there."

"Well, chocolates are things to eat," declared Carl, reaching for his money. "Anyhow, I'm going to have some. I shall not spend much, of course, but——" He stopped suddenly, his face growing a little white. The next instant he was hurrying through all his pockets with shaking hands. "Why, Carrie, I can't—find—my—money," he gasped.

"You don't mean you've lost it?"

"Why, no, of course it isn't l-lost," stammered the boy. "It's just that I can't find it."

Carrie's lips flew open. It was plain to be seen that a tantalizing "I told you so" was all ready to

come. But the next moment the lips snapped tight shut; and when they opened again, it was to utter a cheerful:

"Never mind, Carl. I have some money, and you may have some of mine."

Carl shook his head. He motioned to the boy—who had stopped at his seat—to go on. Then he turned to his sister, his face a little red.

"Carrie, you're great—not to say—what you might. No," he went on emphatically, "I'm just as much obliged, but I reckon I better go without chocolates if I don't know enough to keep my money to buy them with. Besides, if my money's gone, we'd better hold on to yours. But, say, Carrie, I should like to know where that money is!"

"So should I," murmured Carrie.

A little later, when the red-faced man had left the car for a time, the twins made a thorough search for the little brown leather purse that contained the money; but they did not find it. Then, rather soberly, they opened their luncheon box for their mid-day meal.

"I wonder," sighed Carl dolefully, "if this box will really last."

"We've got to make it last," declared Carrie, carefully counting out two sandwiches apiece, "for I haven't seen any food anywhere that folks can buy."

"But where do these other folks eat?" questioned Carl. "I haven't seen one with a luncheon box, but all of them got up and went out somewhere this morning, and now again this noon."

"I don't know," admitted Carrie, pursing her lips a little tightly, "but I do know that if there is anything to eat anywhere, I don't know where it is. So

we've got to make this box last." And neither Carl nor Carrie noticed that the porter was at that moment going through the car, saying, "Last call for luncheon." They would not have understood what he meant if they had heard him.

It was a gloomy afternoon. Outdoors it still snowed—even harder now. In their seats the twins brought out the puzzle and the dominoes, but neither one was a success; and after a time they took up their books and tried to read. They talked a little, though Carl did say once, aggrievedly:

"Seems to me I needn't have lost my money, and had it Christmas Day all at once! If it were not Christmas I think I could stand the rest. But, Carrie, it's Christmas—and look at us! We can't even talk out loud for fear he'll hear us," he finished, jerking his thumb toward the man across the aisle.

The twins had not noticed—what many others had—that the speed of the train had been lessening very perceptibly for the last hour. But they did look up in surprise when the train stopped altogether, with still nothing to be seen outside but the whirling, dancing snow.

Across the aisle the red-faced man sprang suddenly to his feet.

"I declare, I believe we're stuck," he was muttering under his breath. Then he strode toward the forward end of the car.

It was not long before everyone knew it—the engine was fast in a huge snow-drift, and could not go on. They were quite likely to remain where they were for some hours, all night, perhaps—even longer, possibly. And it was Christmas!

Everyone in the car then seemed suddenly to awake to the situation. The red-faced man came

back with his face even redder than before, and with a terrible scowl on his forehead. Irritably, he jerked another magazine from his bag, and then, after a particularly unpleasant look all about the car, he settled himself to read. The young men who had been playing checkers all the afternoon said some sharp words under their breath and hurried from the car. The sad-eyed woman down the aisle fretfully called for a pillow, and settled herself for a nap. The baby cried—whereat the sad-eyed lady looked displeased. Even the old lady at the other end of the car tapped her fingers nervously, lost all interest in her knitting, and gazed sorrowfully out at the driving snow. Indeed it was not a very cheerful-looking company—and it was Christmas!

"See here," whispered Carl, at last, "I'm going to explore. I just must do something!" And he jerked himself to his feet.

"But, Carl, you—you mustn't. You'll get l-lost," quavered Carrie.

"Lost!—on a train stuck fast in a drift," laughed Carl. "I couldn't; don't you see? I'm just going through some of the other cars to find out things. All the men do," he finished a little importantly. Then, with a reassuring smile, he tossed back at her, "Just you wait till I come and tell you what I've discovered!" The next moment he was gone.

It was some time before he came back, but when he did appear his face was all aglow with eagerness.

"See here, Carrie, come with me," he whispered. "It's the greatest fun ever. There are heaps of cars, some like this, and some very different. And, say, there is a car where you eat—all fixed up with pretty little tables, and everything fine. But it costs like fun to eat there—I asked a man.

"And, Carrie, look a-here, beyond that there's another car, and there are lots of folks in it; and it isn't all quiet like this. Why, there is one woman with five children, and they're taking on something awful. They weren't going to Boston. They were going to get off at the next station to-night, where their grandmother lives. And there was going to be a tree, and presents and everything. And now they're shut up here with nothing. No wonder they're crying! I reckon we know what it is—not to have any Christmas! But come on, I want you to see the car with the tables." And glad of something to do at last, Carrie happily skipped off at her brother's side.

It was wonderful, indeed, to go through that long train of cars, and very interestedly the twins, hand in hand, went through them. They lingered a little, perhaps, in the car where were the pretty white tables; though before very long they reached the one where were the woman and the five disappointed children. And then Carrie heard all over again about the tree and the presents that were waiting miles beyond their reach.

There were Tom, five; Mary, seven; a pair of twin girls, Rose and Rita, nine, and Edgar, a boy of twelve; and a sorrier-looking set of boys and girls Carrie never had seen. Most of them were crying, and all of them looked as if they had forgotten how to laugh.

"And that isn't the worst of it," moaned the mother, "we haven't a thing with us to eat, and what'll they be when they're hungry?" she said despairingly. "You see, we didn't leave home till this noon, and we expected to get our supper at grandmother's. And now——" She did not finish, but

with a discouraged sigh picked up Mary, and tried to soothe her whimpering.

"But can't you buy something in the car where the tables are?" ventured Carrie.

The woman shook her head.

"It costs too much to eat there, my dear; besides, we haven't hardly any money with us."

It was then that Carrie pulled at her brother's sleeve, and motioned him away. At the far end of the car she turned, her face alight.

"Carl, Carl, I have a splendid idea! Just listen! Those children shall have a Christmas—and we'll give it to them."

Carl stared.

"We'll give it to them!" he exclaimed. "Why, Carrie, how can we? We haven't a mite of Christmas ourselves, so how can we have one to give away!"

Carrie laughed gleefully.

"I'll tell you. You'll see! But first come back into our own car, where they won't hear us talk."

CHAPTER IV

ONCE again in their seats, Carrie told her plans for the Christmas celebration. She spoke in whispers—she still remembered the red-faced man across the aisle.

"We'll give them some of our things, Carl; don't you see? The things the folks back home gave us—the peppermints and the puzzle and the hair ribbons."

"Why, yes, we could; couldn't we?" cried Carl interestedly. "Those little girls would like the hair ribbons, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, and there's your knife for the boy, too. That'll be just the thing for him!"

Carl frowned suddenly.

"Y-yes," he admitted; "maybe it would. 'Still'—Carl hesitated, and bit his lip. After a moment he turned, his face a little brighter. "Say, Carrie, I don't know, after all as we ought to do it. You know those things were given to us, and I'm afraid Mrs. Golding and all the rest wouldn't like it if we gave them away. They'd feel hurt."

Carrie looked up sharply.

"Carl Abbott—it's your knife that's the trouble—you know it is! You don't want that boy to have it. As if I didn't know why you're suddenly so afraid somebody's feelings will be hurt!"

Carrie spoke this aloud. She quite forgot to whisper. Across the aisle the red-faced man turned abruptly. Even the lady with the sorry eyes stirred a little in her seat.

Carl flushed a shamed red.

"Why, Carrie, it isn't so, either," he stammered. "Of course he can have my knife! It's only that—that—why, Carrie, you know it isn't nice to give things away that were given to you. It—it's just as if you didn't care about them!"

"'Care about them,'" echoed Carrie scornfully. "You know they won't think that about these things, Carl, for they saw us when we received them, and they knew how we liked them. Didn't I 'most cry because those pink and blue hair ribbons were such a beautiful color, and because I hadn't had a new one for a whole year? I don't think they'll worry for fear we don't care for these things. But they'd want us to give them away, I know they would; especially if they could see those five children, and know that they'd lost their Christmas tree."

"Hm-m; maybe, maybe they would," admitted Carl, with the air of one who is trying very hard to let himself be convinced. "Still, you know, we can't give them a tree."

Carrie's face fell.

"I know it. Of course, all we can do is to give them the things—just give them to them, you know; but that will be something. I think we ought to give them some of our luncheon, too, Carl. You know they haven't anything."

"But they could buy something in the car where they eat," suggested Carl.

"They haven't any money to do that; the lady said so. And you said yourself that it costs a lot to eat where the tables"—Carrie stopped suddenly. A new idea seemed to have come to her. "Carl, Carl," she cried. "I've just thought of the loveliest thing!"

"What is it?"

"I sha'n't tell you—yet. But, wait—you'll see. I think—I think I'm going to have a tree. Just you wait till I get back." And breathlessly Carrie hurried out of the car.

When Carrie came back to her seat, a little later, she triumphantly carried a tiny evergreen tree in a pot. She had remembered that in the dining car she had seen several of these little trees used evidently for Christmas decoration; and she determined to get one if she could. She evidently did not have to tease very long for it, as very soon she was back in her own car, hugging the pot to her breast. She was coming slowly. It was about all she could carry.

At Carl's exclamation of wonder and delight, everyone in the car looked up and saw Carrie with the tree.

"There, now, I reckon we can give them a tree, all right," panted Carrie, as she carefully set the pot down on the suit case which Carl had laid flat on the opposite seat.

"My, my, how splendid!" cried Carl. His face was all interest now. He had evidently forgotten all about the knife, and the friends who would feel hurt if the presents were given away. "Now how shall we trim it?"

It was a happy hour that the twins spent then. They forgot their surroundings, and paid no attention to the people about them. They forgot the snow outside, the lost two dollars, and even the red-faced man across the aisle, as they busily set to work to trim their tree.

They had not much to do it with, but they made the most of what they had. Wrapped around one of their presents they found a gilt paper band. This they cut into tiny stars, and hung them by a bit of

thread to the tree branches. Out of some white tissue paper they cut little festoons to imitate strings of popcorn. With some difficulty they pierced several of the pink and white peppermints with a needle and thread, and hung these, too, upon the tree branches. The presents, of course, were too heavy for so small a tree, but the pot at its base was large enough to hold the hair ribbons, the knife—tied up by Carl himself—a pair of red mittens, a handkerchief and a bottle of perfume, all neatly wrapped up and tied with red thread from Carrie's work box, and labeled with a name. There was a gift for each child, and one for the mother; and the tree, with its gilt paper stars, white festoons and pink and white peppermints, began to present a very festive appearance as it neared completion.

Meanwhile, throughout the car a curious change had taken place. If the twins had forgotten their traveling companions, their traveling companions had certainly not forgotten the twins. Moreover, they were getting decidedly interested.

The two young men—the checker-players—had strolled three times by the seat, their eyes on the tree. The lady with the baby had deliberately walked up several seats to the one next the twins'. Indeed, the "wild, uninhabited region," of Carrie's morning report was no longer a "desert," as others, too had seized the opportunity to get nearer the tree.

The sad-eyed lady, with almost a look of interest on her face, was watching the twins intently. The old lady had even forgotten to knit, so engrossed was she in the way the tree decorations were growing. Even the red-faced man in the seat across the aisle—though he pretended to be reading—had not turned

a page for the last half hour; and one of the checker-players told the other that the red-faced man's magazine was upside down, anyway.

"And now," said Carrie, as the last gold star was hung in place, "now for the luncheon box! Then I think we're all ready."

With an audible sigh, Carl reached for the luncheon box and took off the cover for his sister. Anxiously he watched her as she counted out five sandwiches and five pieces of cake. But he said nothing. It was Carrie who sighed this time.

"It does make the box look kind of empty; doesn't it?" she murmured, as she gazed into the box a little ruefully.

Carl swallowed hard once or twice. Then with some difficulty he spoke. "Yes; but say, Carrie, you've only five cakes and sandwiches there, and hadn't the mother—won't she be hungry, too?"

Carrie gave a little cry of dismay.

"Why, Carl, of course she will—and I haven't a thing for her! My, but I'm glad you thought." And she thrust her hand into the box again.

It was this point that the red-faced man across the aisle suddenly dropped his magazine.

"See here," he growled. His voice was just as cross as ever, but there was an almost boyish eagerness in his eyes. "See here, you children just stay where you are a minute, and don't you stir till I come back. Now remember, don't you stir," he finished, as he hurried out of the car.

Thoroughly frightened, Carl and Carrie sat, as he had commanded them to sit, without stirring except to turn their eyes upon each other in silent dismay. They had not seen the almost boyish eagerness in the man's face—they had heard only the

voice; and they expected now nothing short of some terrible punishment to be administered when the man would come back with perhaps one of the blue-coated men, "Mr. Porter," or some other alarming creature who would take away their tree and spoil all their plans. In motionless terror, therefore, they sat waiting.

Other people in the car sat waiting, too, but they were not frightened. They were not frightened even for the twins. They had heard the cross voice, to be sure; but they had seen the eagerness in the eyes, as well, and they sat up now themselves very interestedly, their own eager eyes watching for him to come back. And when he came back, and they saw him, they settled into their seats again with a satisfied smile. But they still watched.

Up the aisle hurried the red-faced man, his hands bearing a big box cover on which lay a pile of grapes, a loaf of frosted cake and a dozen golden-brown rolls.

"There!" he exclaimed with a gruffness that did not deceive even Carl and Carrie this time. "Now tuck those sandwiches of yours back into your box and take these into those children instead!"

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" crowed Carl and Carrie together; and Carl added with unflattering emphasis: "Why, you are nice; aren't you? Er—er—that is," he corrected hastily, "of course, you were nice, too!"

Even the red-faced man had to laugh at this, and half the car joined with him. Then the two young checker-players sprang to their feet.

"Oh, I say, you know," they called out; "you needn't think you are going to have all the fun! Just hold on a minute." And they jerked their suit

cases open and began to fumble in them hurriedly. A minute later they were striding toward Carl and Carrie with several fancy boxes in their hands.

"We were taking this candy home for Christmas," explained the taller of the two fellows.

"Yes, and 'twould be too late now, of course; so maybe you'll take it off our hands," added the other, with what was meant to be a careless air.

"Oh, oh!" chorused the twins even more gleefully. "How perfectly splendid! Why, they'll be glad they're snowed up! Only think—all these things! Why, there'll be enough for the others to have some. You see, there are lots of children in that car."

"Eh? What?" exploded the red-faced man, as he saw Carrie gathering up the things, yet making no move to put back her own sandwiches and cakes into the box. "Are you two precious infants going to starve yourselves to feed the whole carful in there?"

The twins laughed. They even looked fearlessly straight into the red-faced man's eyes.

"We aren't infants, and we aren't going to starve ourselves," chuckled Carl merrily.

"And there are lots left now in the box," added Carrie with eager earnestness. "You don't know—really you don't know—how hungry and lonesome they are in there."

"Humph! Bless me, bless me!" muttered the man, getting to his feet again. "Here now, you just wait a minute till I come back. Now, mind again; don't you stir," he finished, as he hurried once more out of the car.

The twins did stir this time—but it was a happy stir—putting the final touches to the tree and their presents. Others in the car stirred, too; in fact, the whole car seemed to be in sudden commotion. Down

the aisle the little old lady dropped her knitting, opened a reticule on the seat at her side and thrust shaking fingers within. In the other direction, the sad-eyed lady—sad-eyed no longer—was taking from a large suit case a quantity of different-sized, different-shaped packages, done up in white paper and tied with red ribbon. From most of these she removed the little tags bearing "Happy New Year" and a name. Only two or three of the packages did she put back, wrappings untouched, in the bag; then, from somewhere, she produced other blank tags and a pencil, and began to write briskly. On two tags she wrote, "Merry Christmas to Carrie"; on two others, "Merry Christmas to Carl." Then she left her seat and went over to the twins.

"What are the names, my dear, of the five children in the other car, please? You see I had some New Year presents that I think will help them out for their Christmas."

"Oh, have you?" exulted Carrie. "I'm so glad! There's Tom, the littlest, then Mary, she's seven, and the twins, Rose and Rita, a little older, and Edgar, the big boy."

"Thank you," murmured the lady, hurrying back to her seat.

Across the aisle from her, the lady with the baby stopped a moment in her task of doing up a Teddy bear.

"Did she say the smallest one's name was Tom?" she whispered excitedly.

"Yes," nodded the sad-eyed lady, only this time her eyes fairly danced.

At that moment the red-faced man came back. He carried a newspaper heaped with bananas and oranges.

"They wouldn't sell me much—what I wanted," he panted. "Said they didn't know how long we'd be blocked before we could get fresh supplies. But I did get some things," he finished, carefully laying his burden on the seat. "Now, when you're ready, just say the word, and I'll help carry the things."

"Oh, but there are all these, also," interposed the lady that was sad-eyed; "so I'm going to help, too."

"And I," quavered the little old lady, hurrying forward. "I couldn't find much, but I have something—a little something that I want to give. I want to help."

"Of course! We're all going to help," asserted the younger checker-player. "We're going in a regular procession, with Carl and the tree in front. Now, ready—form! Young man, just please take the tree and lead."

It was, indeed, a regular procession that at last trailed its excited, joyous way into the car where the five children were mourning for a Christmas that was lost. And what a commotion it created! The five children stopped mourning and stared. Other children, and men and women stared, too, as Carl, with a gleeful "Merry Christmas!" advanced to the center of the car, placed the tree carefully on an empty seat, then stood aside to make room for those behind him to lay down their gifts also.

And what a Christmas that was, to be sure! Outside, the wind howled and the snow blew, but inside, no one noticed. The whole car was alive with laughter, fun and Christmas cheer. There was not a child in the car who did not have some gift, together with cake and candy, and a big, round orange, or a banana. Even Carl and Carrie, to their unbounded amazement, found four little packages bearing their names:

a pretty little bead necklace and a new book for Carrie; a particularly fine knife and another book for Carl.

The older ones, too, enjoyed the fruit and the candy, nor did the sandwiches, rolls and cake remain long before they melted from sight. Even the conductors, the porter and a brakeman, who were hovering around the doorways, were not forgotten; for the red-faced man spied them and hailed them jovially, insisting that they, too, come and join in the feast.

When it was all over, the procession formed once more and trailed back into the sleeping car; then everybody settled down again into the seats. But with what a change!

Carl and Carrie talked like magpies—and the red-faced man only beamed at them from across the car. The checker-players got out their game again—but this time they had the little old lady for a spectator. It seemed that she, too, liked checkers, and when the young fellows found that out, they promptly challenged her to play a game with the winner, much to her fluttering delight.

The sad-eyed lady was laughing now, and playing with the baby across the way, while the baby's mother looked on and smiled happily. A very different group, indeed, from what it had been three hours before. And when, in due time, the twins had climbed into their berths, the whole car echoed the sentiments of Carl:

"Why, Carrie," he sighed happily, "we haven't been giving a Christmas to anybody. We've just been having a Christmas ourselves!"

CHAPTER V

THE morning after Christmas, the train still remained motionless. The snow had ceased falling the night before, showing a wonderful world of glistening whiteness, so dazzling that one could not look at it long.

Time now, however, did not hang heavily on the twins' hands. There were the new books to read, and there were the new friends with which to talk and play games. They played checkers with the two young men, and dominoes with the old lady. She was a jolly little old lady, and she did so like games! They played "telling stories" with the sad-eyed lady and pat-a-cake with the baby. They went into the car, too, where were the five "Christmas children," as they called Mary, Tom, the twin girls and Edgar; and there they found many more delightful things to amuse them.

Two things only worried Carl and Carrie. One was, that the luncheon box was getting so dangerously low, and the other was, what would Aunt Harriet think when they did not come?

"Of course we won't really starve," Carrie argued in a low voice over their luncheon that noon. "Not if we ever get started so that we can reach there before our money's all gone. You see, our money won't go so very far, when things cost so much in that car where they eat."

"No—especially if you've lost half of it," retorted

Carl bitterly, his cheeks flaming a shamed red. "Carrie, where do you suppose that money went?"

Carrie shook her head.

"I don't know; but it's gone, and we can't help it now, so all we have to do is to make what we have left go as far as it will—both the food and the money. That's why I—I thought I didn't care for but one sandwich this noon," she finished, trying to look unconcerned.

"Oh," said Carl, eyeing the sandwich in his hand a little ruefully. "Oh, well, I reckon I don't, either," he finished, hastily dropping the sandwich back into the box.

Carrie looked distressed.

"Of course, Carl, if—if you're hungry"—she began hesitatingly.

Carl lifted his chin and looked straight into his sister's eyes. "I reckon I'm not any more hungry than you are," he said very decisively, and with meaning emphasis.

Carrie laughed and colored a little.

"Never mind, Carl; when we arrive in Boston I expect Aunt Harriet'll give us just heaps to eat—if we ever do get started!"

It was not long after this that the red-faced man came into the car with a beaming smile.

"Well," he announced joyfully, "they've dug us out at last! We'll be under way now in no time."

True to this prediction, the train did start very soon; and with a wild whoop of joy Carl hailed the first turn of the wheels. The rest of the afternoon the twins sat entranced, watching the swiftly changing landscape. Then, when the early winter darkness hid everything from sight, they turned with a hungry sigh to their luncheon box. Yet it was with

almost as hungry a sigh that they turned away from it a little later, after a very "saving meal," as Carrie called it.

Breakfast the next morning was even a more saving meal. The luncheon box was very low now.

"And you see, it's only Thursday," said Carrie a little soberly, as she peered into the box. "We were going to get there Friday; but they say now it'll be Saturday. And that leaves us all of today and tomorrow and part of Saturday that we shall have to eat."

"'All of today and tomorrow and part of Saturday that we shall have to eat,'" echoed Carl, with a feeble laugh. "I don't know whether 'today and tomorrow and next day' will be good eating or not; but I s'pose we mustn't be too particular, as that's about all we shall have to eat!"

Carrie laughed at his joke—but her laugh, too, was a little faint. Like Carl, she was hungry.

"Well, anyway, you know what I mean," she sighed. "We've only this little bit in the box, and the two dollars, and we must make it last somehow, till we get to Aunt Harriet's, Saturday."

"Hm-m, I know," frowned Carl. "And they said it cost a whole dollar just for one to eat once in the car where the tables are. Say, Carrie, I wish I hadn't lost that money!"

Carrie did not answer. Her eyes were out of the window, yet she did not seem to see what she was looking at. Suddenly she turned with a triumphant little cry.

"Carl, I'll tell you," she whispered. "Let's play it is a game, and we're lost in a desert. Then we'll have to divide our rations; see?"

"Y-yes," assented Carl, but without much enthu-

siasm, his hungry eyes on the food still left in the bottom of the big box.

"Now here are six sandwiches, five cookies, two pickles, three pieces of cold meat, one piece of pie and two doughnuts," cried Carrie, beginning to appear very cheerful indeed. Of course one was cheerful when one was playing a game! That there might be no mistake about her being cheerful, Carrie was talking aloud now, in a clear, high-pitched voice. "Now, here are just nineteen pieces of food," she went on, "and there are two more meals today, and three tomorrow. That'll be five."

"But there's Saturday, the last day," interposed Carl.

"Yes, I know. I've saved the money for that. There'll be two meals if we don't get to Boston till afternoon, but we can't have both, of course, on just two dollars. We'll each eat one, and eat all we can; then maybe it won't be so very hard to wait till we get to Aunt Harriet's."

"Humph!" grunted Carl.

"But, Carl, listen! We must divide our rations now for those two days; don't you see? Now here are nineteen things, and five meals to eat them in. Dear, dear," she frowned, "why couldn't there have been twenty things? Five would go into twenty easy; but nineteen——"

"Pooh! Make it twenty, then," retorted Carl. And with careful precision he cut the one piece of pie into two. "There! There you are!"

"Oh, that'll be easy now," cried Carrie. "See? Five goes into twenty, four times. So we can have four things for each meal, and that means two apiece. Now, choose Carl. Pick your two things

for the first meal—that's this noon—dinner, you know."

After some deliberation Carl chose one sandwich and one piece of pie. It was not so easy, however, to lay them one side, as he was told to do. After Carrie chose her sandwich and cooky, he had his supper to select. It was not any easier to lay that to one side. To tell the truth, Carl, at that moment, had a decided inclination to eat both his dinner and his supper, to say nothing of a possible nibble at the breakfast intended for the next morning.

So absorbed were the twins sorting out the contents of their luncheon box that they did not notice the red-faced man across the aisle. But the red-faced man was very plainly noticing them. Again he had forgotten, for a long time, to turn a page of his magazine. Over its top his eyes were furtively watching the children.

An hour passed. The luncheon box was put away now, each day's rations carefully sorted and separated by bits of paper. The twins were looking out of the window. There was a good deal to be seen today, yet the two did not seem to be quite happy. There was a hungry look in their eyes, and a wistful droop to their mouths.

Two hours passed. The red-faced man had long since gone back to reading his magazine, though once he did stop long enough to write a few carefully formed words on the page he tore from his notebook. After putting the bit of paper away in his pocket, he went back to his reading.

It was just as the twins reached for their luncheon box to eat their noonday meal that the red-faced man seemed to stir into sudden life. Jerkily he sprang to his feet. With somewhat of a flourish he took the

bit of paper from his pocket and presented it to Carrie.

"For you and your brother," he said, bowing very low. And wonderingly Carrie read aloud:

"Mr. George Egbert Howe presents his compliments and would be pleased to have Miss Carrie and Master Carl take luncheon with him Thursday, December 27, at 12:30 o'clock."

"Why, what"—began Carrie in a puzzled voice.

"Why, say, to-day's Thursday!" interposed Carl, moistening his lips. "You don't mean that you——" He stopped, his face falling a little. "Who—who is this Mr. George Egbert Howe?" he asked then, a little fearfully.

The red-faced man laid his hand on his heart with mock ceremony.

"At your service," he bowed again. "I am Mr. George Egbert Howe."

"And you mean—you want us to—to eat with you this noon?" asked Carrie.

"If you'll be so kind."

"Kind!" exploded Carl delightedly. Then he turned to his sister. "Oh, I say, Carrie, won't that be jolly? That'll leave all our dinner to go with our supper tonight!"

Carrie blushed scarlet. She had tried desperately to stop the rush of words on Carl's lips; but in vain. She turned hurriedly to Mr. Howe. She hoped that if she spoke soon enough he might not pay much attention to what Carl had said.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, sir," she cried. "I'm sure we'd just love to eat with you, and we think you're splendid to ask us."

"Er, yes," cut in Carl hastily; "er—yes, indeed!"

Thus it happened that the twins found themselves,

—for—all this. I think it was the very nicest meal we ever, ever ate!”

“Yes, sir; oh, yes, sir, it was,” echoed Carl fervently.

As Carl had prophesied, the twins did eat their dinner and supper in one that evening, from the luncheon box, though, to tell the truth, they were not very hungry, after all, so bountiful had been their noonday meal with Mr. Howe.

The next day a second invitation for luncheon came from Mr. Howe, and the meal proved to be as delightful as the one the day before. They were good friends with Mr. Howe by that time. All the afternoon before, and all that morning, he had been over in their seat, telling them all about the wonderful things flying past the windows.

To the twins the whole day was wonderful—quite the most wonderful of the trip that far, they told each other when night came. The change at Chicago, under Mr. Howe's and the conductor's kind care, had been nothing but a delight. Quite the most wonderful thing of all, however, as the twins looked at it, was something that had happened that morning before they reached Chicago. And this is what it was:

Very soon after breakfast Carrie had said low in Carl's ear: “Carl, I'm going to give that good, kind Mr. Porter one of my dollars.”

“Why, Carrie Abbot! What for?” Carl had answered.

“I've been talking to him just now, and yesterday, too; and he told me all about his little girl that is ill and that she needs medicine and a doctor.”

“But, Carrie, a whole dollar! And you know I—I lost mine!”

"I know, but it doesn't matter now. We'll be there so soon—to Aunt Harriet's. We ate with Mr. Howe yesterday, and he says we're going to today, and again tomorrow 'for the final spread'—he called it—so our luncheon box will last for the rest, and we won't need the money, Carl; and that little girl does. I'm going to give it to him now. He's down by the door." And before Carl could speak she was away. But very soon she was back again. Her face wore a puzzled frown.

"Carl, he wouldn't take it."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"But Mr. Smith gave him money; I saw him."

"I know it," nodded Carrie; "and he seemed to like it then. But today he—looked awfully funny, Carl."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Why, first he looked frightened, then sort of ashamed, someway; then he was real queer looking, you know, almost as if he was going to cry. And he stammered and talked so fast I couldn't understand half he said, only he wouldn't take the money."

"Was he angry?"

"Oh, no! Not a bit like that. He thanked me over and over again, and said how good and kind I was, and how he should always remember it to his dying day; but he pushed the money away as if he was actually afraid of it."

"Why, how queer!" murmured Carl.

It was a little later that the porter came up to Carl and held out a small, leather purse.

"Is that yours, sah?" he asked, showing all his teeth in a smile, but holding out the purse in a hand that shook a little.

"Well, I should say it was!" cried Carl joyfully. "That's my purse that I lost. It has my two dollars in it; see?" he added, snapping open the clasp. "Why, where did you find it?"

"In the berth—up there," replied the porter hurriedly. "I s'pects maybe you lost it in the clothes, and it fell down. Yes, sah; all right, sah," he finished, backing away; nor would he stay a minute longer to hear Carl and Carrie's eager thanks.

It was Carl who, a short time afterwards, turned to Carrie with troubled eyes.

"Carrie, you don't suppose," he began, then stopped. "Carrie, I missed that purse Tuesday morning, and this is Friday morning. Why didn't he bring it to me before, if he found it? You don't suppose he——" The boy stopped again, a look of distress coming to his face.

Carrie flushed. She, too, looked distressed.

"Carl Abbott, don't you think of such a thing for a minute. Of course he didn't mean to keep it! If he found it before, he didn't know whose it was, I'm sure. And if he didn't know, he wanted it, of course, for that poor little girl of his who is ill."

"I know," nodded Carl, still with the troubled look on his face; "but, you see, he wouldn't take the money you offered him, and maybe 'twas because of this, and he was ashamed to. And then maybe 'twas because you were so kind to him that he felt badly, and brought it back to me."

"I don't believe it," declared Carrie stoutly. "He's a poor man, and he has that sick little girl, and he needs some money. I'm going to ask Mr. Howe to take up a collection from all the people before we get to Chicago, and give it to him for the little girl. I am!"

Carrie did tell Mr. Howe, and Mr. Howe did take up the collection before they reached Chicago.

"And Mr. Porter just cried when I gave it to him," said Carrie to Carl afterwards. "And I just know he's good and honest. Anyway, if he wasn't before, he will be now," she finished emphatically; which, was, as it happened, exactly the truth of the matter—though Carrie did not quite know how truly she spoke.

CHAPTER VI

AS the train drew near to Boston, Saturday afternoon, the twins began to be nervous, and a little frightened. Home and old friends seemed to be a long, long way from them now, and Aunt Harriet seemed very new and untried. Even the friends they had made in the car were so busy with their own preparations for arrival, that they could pay little attention to anything else; and the twins found themselves left pretty much alone.

"I wish I could stay and see Aunt Harriet, youngsters," said Mr. Howe, as the train was pulling into the long train shed at Boston; "but I'm a day late as it is, and I have matters to attend to that can't be kept waiting any longer. Now good-by, and be good; and here's a little souvenir to remember me by," he finished, as he dropped two bright five-dollar gold pieces into their hands. The next moment he was gone, in spite of their delighted chorus of thanks. He was, indeed, the first passenger off the steps of the sleeping car.

Very nervously, Carl picked up his suit case and led the way; yet he tried to appear confident and cheerful, as befitted the "man of the family."

"Come on, Carrie, here we are at last! Never mind the luncheon box. Leave it. It's empty. Aunt Harriet won't want that."

Through the car and down the steps the two children hurried, Carl tugging the suit case, Carrie close at his heels. Only the conductor nodded good-by to them.

"Let's see; I believe your aunt meets you here, doesn't she?" asked the conductor, as he helped them down.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," nodded Carl, trying to look as if he had been to Boston a dozen times before.

"All right! Good-by," called the conductor.

Nobody else noticed them at all. Some of their new friends had said good-by at Chicago; the others knew that their aunt Harriet was to meet them, so nobody felt that they needed attention. All were busy and excited, too, meeting friends of their own.

At the end of the first half-dozen steps Carl paused doubtfully.

"I s'pose we'd better go with the rest," he said to Carrie, his eyes questioning. "I s'pose Boston is down that way."

A blue-coated man near them, who had heard the words, chuckled a little.

"I think 'tis, young man. Look a-here, don't you know where you are? Isn't there anybody to meet you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; Aunt Harriet," answered Carl quickly. "She lives in Boston, you know."

"Well, I didn't know—but I do now," smiled the man. "She knows you're coming, I suppose."

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Well, you just keep right on going with the crowd, and you'll see her. Keep straight ahead."

"All right; thank you, sir," returned Carl, as, with a fresh hold on the suit case, he led the way down the long, narrow passage between the cars.

"I wonder what she does look like," panted Carrie.

"Don't know. But she knows what we look like, all right, so we don't have to worry for fear she

won't find us. Mrs. Golding told her all about us in the letter, you know. She said she did."

"Well, anyhow, I hope she'll be big and round, with a shoulder all comfy to—to cry on," faltered Carrie.

Carl did not answer. He was looking about him a little anxiously. They had almost reached the end of the train now, and he could see the wide expanse of platform beyond the gates. He was wondering which way he should turn when he reached there.

"Say, I—I wish Aunt Harriet would come," he murmured.

Beyond the gates the twins stopped and looked about them. Everywhere were men, women and children; but most of them seemed to know exactly where they were going. A few, to be sure, stood about as if looking for some one, and these—especially the women—Carl eyed very hopefully. Some one of them, somewhere, must be Aunt Harriet, he was sure. But nobody spoke to them; nobody seemed to notice them at all; and, after a time, the twins began to walk back and forth uneasily.

Suddenly Carl gave an exclamation.

"Say, Carrie, there's a great big room with seats in it, and 'most everybody seems to be going in. There are heaps of folks in there, too. See? Right through those glass doors. Let's go in. Perhaps Aunt Harriet'll be there. She wouldn't want to stand up all the time she was waiting for us, of course."

It was, indeed, a "great, big room," and it had many seats in it. There were many people there, too; so many, many people that the twins stopped

with a gasp of dismayed wonder just inside the door.

"Whew! Just look at them!" breathed Carl. "There must be a show or something here today!"

Carrie did not answer. She had caught Carl's coat sleeve in her hand and was clinging fast hold of it. After a minute Carl spoke again.

"Say, Carrie, there's just one thing we'll have to do. Aunt Harriet will never find us if we stand here by the door. She's sitting in one of those seats, of course, but where we don't know. Now we've got to walk slowly by every one of them; then she'll see us and stop us."

"Why, yes, of course," answered Carrie with something a little more like courage in her voice. But she still kept tight hold of that coat sleeve.

Up and down, in and out, by every seat the twins walked, peering into every woman's face, and stopping hopefully several times. But nobody spoke, and nobody seemed to notice them particularly. At last, tired and thoroughly frightened, the twins dropped into the last two seats and set the suit case down in front of them.

"I reckon we'll have to wait till she finds us," stammered Carl then, winking very fast, and swallowing very hard between some of the winks. "Maybe she'll find us better, anyhow, if we sit still," he finished bravely.

Carrie began to cry softly, though she, too, tried to force the tears back.

"But, Carl, look at the clock! We've been here more than an hour. What if Aunt Harriet never comes? What if she never finds us?"

At that moment a very pleasant-faced lady not far away got up hastily and came toward them.

"What is the matter, my dear?" she said kindly to Carrie. "I've been watching you for some time. You seem troubled about something."

Both the children turned joyfully.

"Oh!" cried Carl. "Aren't you—aren't you Aunt Harriet?"

"Please, please be Aunt Harriet," begged Carrie, her voice breaking in a sob.

The lady smiled—but she looked very sorry, too.

"It's too bad, my dears, but I'm afraid I'm not Aunt Harriet," she answered gently; "but perhaps I can help you in some way. You were looking for Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes, and she's looking for us," answered Carl.

"She was going to meet us," explained Carrie.

"Then she expected you?" asked the lady.

"Oh, yes; but we were snowed up, and arrived here today instead of yesterday, so maybe she didn't know just when to meet us," spoke up Carl.

The lady frowned and bit her lip.

"And you don't know—where she lives?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, we know that," answered Carl proudly.

"I didn't lose this," he added with a triumphant glance at Carrie, as he carefully pulled out a slip of paper from his pocket, bearing a name and an address.

"'Mrs. Harriet Blake,'" read the lady aloud, her face clearing. "And there's the street and the number, too. Oh, you'll be all right now. We'll have you there very soon. I'd go with you myself, but I can't do that, for I must take a certain train, and I haven't time before it goes. But wait right here, please, till I come back. I'll fix it for you—but

don't go away from this seat," she cautioned the children earnestly as she hurried away.

"Just as if we would!" choked Carrie. "Why, I'd stay all night if she told me to."

"Yes, if she said she'd come back," amended Carl practically.

In a very short time the lady did come back. With her was a tall, blue-coated man wearing a hat that Carrie thought looked like a bell that was not quite round.

"There, my dears," announced the lady pleasantly; "this kind man is Mr. Murphy, and he will go with you himself to your Aunt Harriet's house, and he won't leave you till you are in Aunt Harriet's arms. Now, good-by. You'd better hurry, for Aunt Harriet will be worried."

They did hurry; they hurried, indeed, a little too fast for Carl's wishes. Much as he wanted to find Aunt Harriet, he wanted, also, to see something of all the wonderful things about him; for Carl was not used to a great city's streets, full of cars, carriages, automobiles and hurrying throngs of people.

Carrie, however, was thinking more of Aunt Harriet, interested as she was in the wonders all about her. And it was Carrie who gave the dismayed cry at the answer of the woman who came to the door in reply to Mr. Murphy's ring of the bell.

"Is Mrs. Harriet Blake in?" Mr. Murphy had asked; and the woman had answered:

"There isn't anybody by that name here, sir. My name is Hendricks."

"But it—it's on the paper," sobbed Carrie. "The paper says she lives here; doesn't it, Mr. Murphy?"

Mr. Murphy himself was looking at the paper with frowning eyes.

"This is number 231?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; but there isn't any Blake here," answered the woman with decision.

Suddenly, from an inner room, appeared a man.

"Were you looking for Blake—Mrs. Blake?" he asked.

"Yes, oh, yes—Aunt Harriet," cried both Carl and Carrie, before the officer could reply.

"Well, she isn't here. She did live here once, though; but she moved away three or four years ago."

"Where did she move to?" asked Mr. Murphy, hurriedly taking a pencil from his pocket.

"I don't know. This house was empty when we took it; but I know that people by the name of Blake had lived in it."

"But isn't there anybody in the house who knows?"

"I'm afraid not. You see, my wife and I are the only ones here, anyhow. I do know she didn't move anywhere in Boston, though," he added, "so I'm afraid the directory wouldn't help you. They went to one of the suburbs. The agent who rented me the house told me that."

"Where is that agent?" Mr. Murphy's voice again was hopeful.

The other man shook his head.

"Gone West a year ago."

The officer bit his lip and sighed.

"Of course I might try the telephone directory," he said, "but we don't know her husband's name, you see."

The woman in the doorway smiled a little.

"You couldn't very well call up two or three

columns of Blakes and ask if the wife's name was 'Harriet,' could you?" she said.

The officer shook his head. He was too disturbed to smile at her little joke.

"Well, thank you," he sighed, as he turned away. "We'll ask two or three of the neighbors here, and if they don't know, we'll have to try the next best thing," he finished, as he led the way down the steps to the sidewalk.

The street was a short cross street between two wide avenues, and there were few people on it to-day. The houses loomed tall and solemn, and all alike on either side. At the door of several of these Mr. Murphy inquired for news of Mrs. Blake's whereabouts; but in vain. Then, with a shake of his head, he turned to leave the street.

"But what can we do?" faltered Carrie, looking about her with fearful eyes.

The officer smiled cheerily. "Don't worry. It'll all come right in the end. First, we'll have your pictures taken; then we'll try to get you on the front page of all the Boston papers so that Aunt Harriet can see you, and come and get you. Of course——" He stopped suddenly. Both the children, with a wild cry of joy, had flung themselves upon a red-faced man who had just turned the corner of the street.

"Well, well; bless me, bless me!" cried the red-faced man. "If here aren't my two little friends from the West!"

"Then you know them, sir?" asked the officer, visibly relieved.

"Mr. Howe, Mr. Howe," panted Carl, before the man could answer, "Aunt Harriet has moved away.

What shall we do? There isn't any Mrs. Blake that lives on this street at number 231!"

"Eh? What? Blake?" exploded Mr. Howe. "Why didn't you tell me your aunt Harriet's name was Blake, and that she lived on this street?"

"Then do you know Mrs. Blake?" cut in the officer.

"Know her? I should say I do. Lived here on the same street with her for years. She's a great friend of my wife's, too. Bless me, bless me! And is she your Aunt Harriet? Well, well, this is a small world, after all."

"And where does she live now, sir?" asked Mr. Murphy, a broad smile on his face.

"Cambridge. Come, come; I'll have you there in no time. My motor car is waiting just around the corner. Bless me," he cried again, an arm flung around each twin. "And so Harriet Blake is your Aunt Harriet? And she'll be glad to have you, too. She lost a boy last winter, and a girl the year before. She's been ill herself for years. That's probably why she hasn't sent for you before. But she's better now. She'll be glad to see you; never fear!"

"Then why didn't she—meet us?" quavered Carrie. "It seems queer that she didn't come or send someone. We were so frightened when we could not find her."

Mr. Howe frowned.

"Don't know; but there's some good reason, I'll warrant. Some mistake, somewhere. She wouldn't have left you that way; indeed she wouldn't! Now come quickly; and you, too, Mr. Officer, so you can see that they reach Aunt Harriet all right," he finished jovially.

Not an hour later the twins, one on each side of

a smiling-faced, teary-eyed woman, looked across at each other joyously. The first excitement of the meeting was over. Explanations about the letter that had never been received had all been made. It was then that Carl drew a long breath.

"Say, Carrie," he called a little mischievously, "she's little, and I just know that she's lively and jolly, too!"

Carrie smiled mistily.

"Well, anyhow," she called back, "I know she's got a lovely shoulder to cry on—'cause I've tried it!"

Then both of them laughed and gave Aunt Harriet a bearlike hug.

THE END



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